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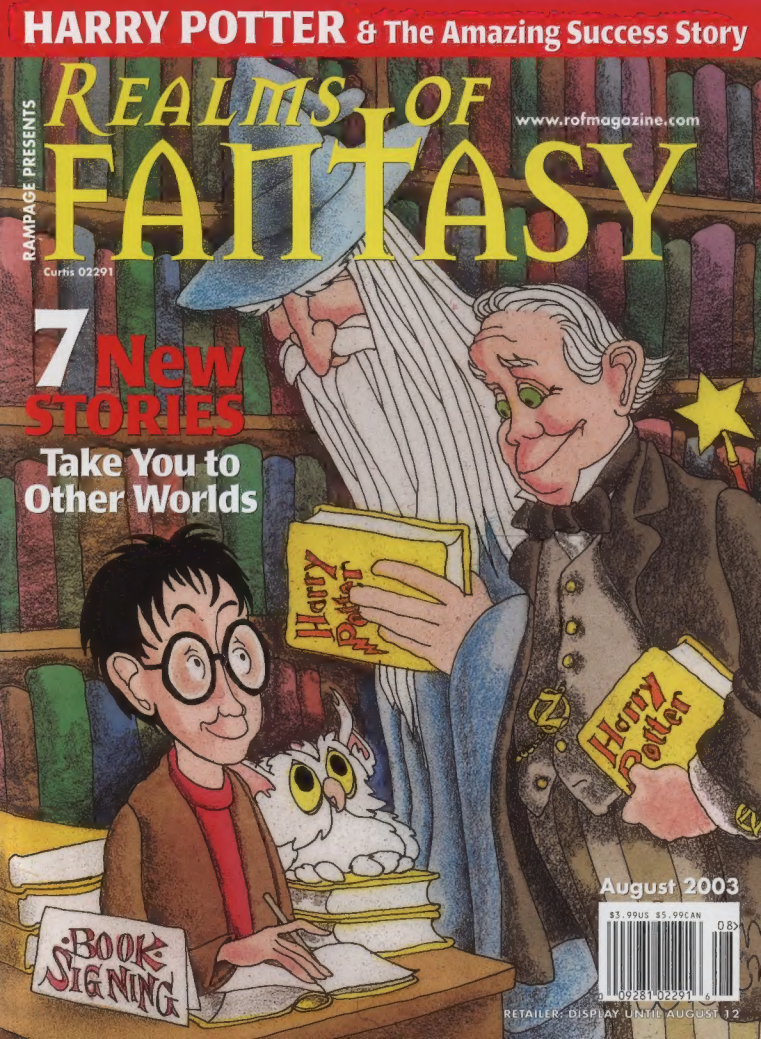

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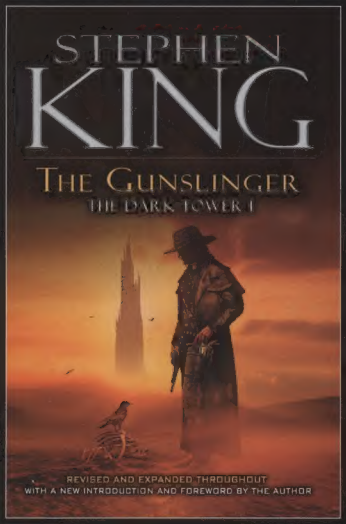

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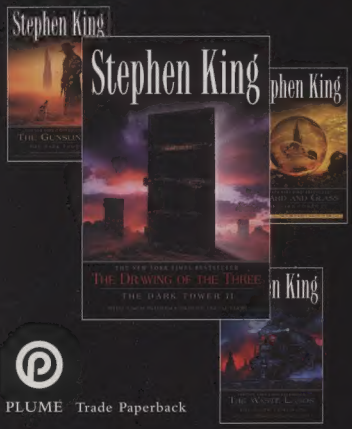

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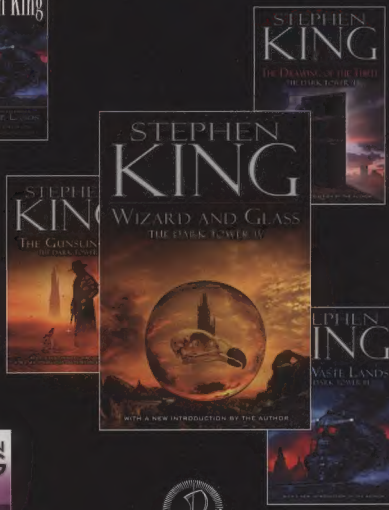

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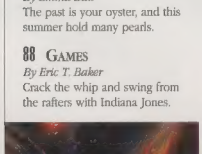

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contributors

KAGE BAKER was born in Hollywood, California, in 1952. Her first story of the time-traveling Dr. Zeus Incorporated, "Noble Mind," appeared in *Asimov's* in 1997 and has been followed by numerous others since. Her first novel of the Company, *In the Garden of Iden*, was published in 1997. Subsequent novels include *Sky Coyote*, *Mendoza in Hollywood*, and *The Graveyard Game*. She taught Elizabethan English for the stage with the Living History Centre for a number of years, and is currently a teacher and director for As You Like It Productions. She lives in Pismo Beach, California.

EMMA BULL's day job is writing fantasy and science fiction; her work includes *War for the Oaks* and *Bone Dance* and, with Steven Burst, *Freedom and Necessity*. In her goofing-off time, she's been spotted making a fool of herself on stage at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival, romping her way through Regency and Victorian balls, and missing targets at Single Action Shooting Society events.

JANE FRANK, along with her husband Howard, is a well-known and longtime art collector who in 1991 founded the art agency Worlds of Wonder. In addition to publishing numerous magazine articles and essays on artists and the art of collecting, she co-authored (with Howard) an art book documenting their 30+-year collecting habit, *The Frank Collection: A Showcase of the World's Fantastic Art* (Paper Tiger, 1999). A second book on their collection, *Great Fantasy Themes from the Frank Collection*, was published in spring 2003, and *The Art of John Berkey* is due out in fall 2003.

LAURA ANNE GILMAN began her writing career in 1994 with a sale to *Amazing Stories*. Since then, she has published almost 20 short stories, three media tie-in novels (two *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, one *Poltergeist: The Legacy* as L.A. Liverakos), been reprinted in high school and middle school textbooks, written three nonfiction books for teenagers, and edited two anthologies (*OtherWere* and *Treachery and Treason*). In there somewhere she also has a full-time job working as an editor for a major publishing house. She can be found online at www.sff.net/people/lauraanne.gilman.

KRISTEN MCDERMOTT is an Assistant Professor of English Literature at Central Michigan University, specializing in Early Modern English Studies (particularly Drama and Theater History) and Shakespeare. She has published articles on Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, and is editing a collection of Ben Jonson's court masques for Manchester University Press. She lives in Michigan with her husband, Ari Berk, a poet and professor of mythology and folklore, and their son, Robin. The full, unedited text of this article (along with past Folkroots articles by Terri Windling, Ari Berk, and others) can be found on the Endicott Studio for Mythic Arts Web site: www.endicott-studio.com.

SANDRA MCDONALD is a military veteran, former Hollywood assistant, and a graduate of the 2001 Viable Paradise Workshop. Having lived in Guam, London, Key West, Newfoundland and LA, she now resides in Massachusetts and recently completed a new novel.

RICHARD PARKS is a longtime contributor to *Realms of Fantasy*. His first short story collection, *THE OGRES' WIFE: Fairy Tales for Grownups*, is now available from Obscura Press and contains several stories that were published here first. It is reviewed in this issue's Books column.

TIM PRATT lives in the San Francisco Bay area, where he edits at *Star*Line*, the journal of the Science Fiction Poetry Association, and works at *Locus* as an Assistant Editor. His short story "Little Gods" was a finalist for the 2003 Nebula Award.Visit his Web site at www.sff.net/people/timpratt.

SARAH PRINEAS has a PhD in English and teaches a course on fantasy and science fiction literature at the University of Iowa. She lives in Iowa City with her physicist husband and two small children. Her work has appeared in the Hugo-nominated online magazine *Strange Horizons* (www.strangehorizons.com).

ALAN SMALE grew up in Yorkshire, England, but is now in America to stay. His science fiction and fantasy stories have appeared in many professional and small press markets including *Realms of Fantasy* (June 1998), *Writers of the Future Volume 13, Low Port*,and Harcourt Brace YA anthologies *A Wizards Dozen, A Nightmares Dozen, Dark Regions*, and *Adventures of Sword & Sorcery*. Alan is currently marketing a couple of fantasy novels. He also sings bass in and serves as business manager for up-and-coming high-energy vocal band The Chromatics, and performs occasionally in community theater. Visit his Web site at www.alansmale.com.

KAREN TRAVISS is a journalist from Hampshire, England. Her short stories have appeared in *Asimov's* and *On Spec*, and the first novel in her *City of Pearl* science fiction trilogy is due to be published by HarperCollins early in 2004.

MARY LARUE WELLS lives and paints in Reston, Virginia, and Scottsdale, Arizona. Wells is a Fine Arts graduate of the University of Washington in Seattle. Her gently surrealistic paintings can be seen at the Greater Reston Arts Center, Reston, Virginia; Gallery K in Washington, DC; and Moon Shell on Hilton Head Island. Her next one-person show will be at the Reston Community Center at Lake Anne in November 2003.

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Contributors:
Eric T. Baker, Kage Baker, Emma Bull, Jane Frank, Laura Anne Gilman, Kristen McDermott, Sandra McDonald, Resa Nelson, Richard Parks, Tim Pratt, Sarah Prineas, Alan Smale, Karen Traviss, Gahan Wilson, Paul Witcover

DIANE BONIFANTI
Business Manager

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SANDRA HILLYARD
Subscription Customer Service

Curtis Circulation Company
Worldwide Distribution

Advertising Offices:

JOE VARDA
Vice President & Advertising Director
(703) 733-2160

COLIN T. SMITH
Advertising Representative
(703)733-2163

CINDY TINKER
Advertising Production Coordinator
(703) 733-2174

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By Resa Nelson

Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* adapts to the big screen.

Adaptations are tricky.

If you've seen the movie *Adaptation*, you know it's about a screenwriter so perplexed and frustrated by the task of writing a script based on a nonfiction book about orchids that he gives up and writes a screenplay about himself and his writing problems instead. Likewise, fans of any given novel are often just as frustrated by a movie based on the book unless that movie is a literal translation from page to film. That's one reason why the *Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter movies have excelled at the box office—they're faithful to the source material, the novels by J.R.R. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling.

Adaptations are tricky, because a movie typically puts a two- to three-hour time limit on storytelling. Being utterly faithful to a novel can result in six to 10-plus hours, a project better suited as a TV miniseries than a feature film. Planning a feature film demands making decisions about what to keep, what to leave out, and what to condense. Those decisions are often drastic, as in the case of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, a potential summer blockbuster scheduled for release on July 11 by Twentieth Century Fox and Mediastream 1 Productions. Like the film *From Hell*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (a k a *LXG*) is based on the first volume of six issues of *LXG* comics by Alan Moore.

The character of Tom Sawyer (Shane West) was added to represent the future, whereas Allan Quatermain (Sean Connery) represents the past.

"It's a brilliant idea, it's a brilliant world, it's a brilliant energy," producer Don Murphy says about Moore's comic. "In order to make this film, I targeted it as a big, $100 million summer super-hero blockbuster. That's not what the comic really is, if you go back and read it—everybody is having cocktails and tea, and meeting each other and trying to figure out what the problem is. And then it turns out, the problem is someone wants to bomb London from the air. It's all perfect for the comic, but it's not enough of a menace, and it's not enough of a story for a big summer movie."

Several years ago, when Murphy was producing *From Hell*, he asked Moore what he was working on. Moore described his idea for *LXG* and gave a treatment to Murphy, who immediately set the wheels in motion to bring it to the screen.

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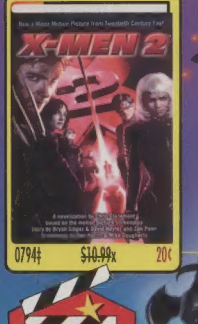

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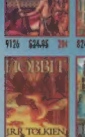

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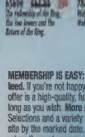

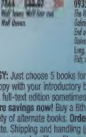

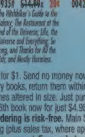

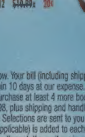

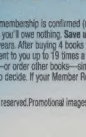

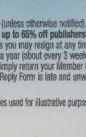

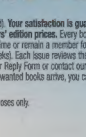

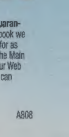

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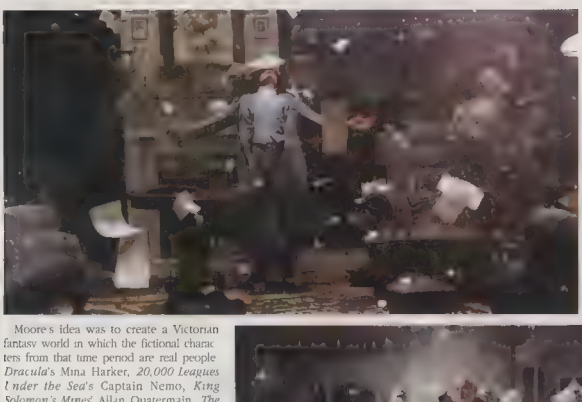
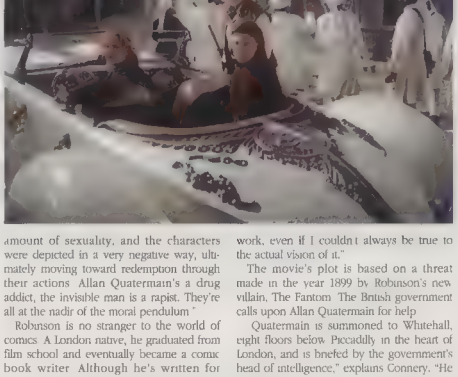


LEFT LXG has more miniature effects than any Fox film since Titanic.

BELOW *Mina Harker (Peta Wilson), who is said to have survived Dracula, is the only woman in the League. In the movie she is a vampire superheroine*



Moore's idea was to create a Victorian fantasy world in which the fictional characters from that time period are real people. *Dracula's* Mina Harker, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea's* Captain Nemo, *King Solomon's Mines'* Allan Quatermain, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde's* title character, and a spinoff character based on H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*.

Director Stephen Norrington (*Blade*) describes the concept as "Superheroes before there were superheroes."

Sean Connery (*Highlander, First Knight*), who stars as Allan Quatermain, reveals what drew him to the project. "I knew all the characters because I'd read the books and was curious how they could all be folded into a screenplay. The script presented some ideas I really liked and thought could be made to work. Quatermain is a very firm foundation to the story. He's an instinctive hunter, and his old-fashioned traits are easily recognizable.

"I believed the film would need to be visually interesting to support this kind of story. I knew Stephen had directed *Blade*, and I was very conscious of how visually stunning that movie was. When we met to discuss this project he graphically described everything he was going to be shooting, and I was agreeable to it."

The characters join forces to battle a villain threatening London. But one of the first challenges was changing Moore's original villain and his goal.

"In the comic book, the foe is Fu Manchu," says screenwriter James Robinson. "There were a lot of things about the structure of the comic book and the fact that it might be perceived as a negative view of Asians that meant changes were required, both to make a movie with a three-act structure and to make it palatable for a modern audience. [Moore] was writing it with a dark sense you might expect of Victorian literature: very violent, with language, with some amount of sexuality, and the characters were depicted in a very negative way, ultimately moving toward redemption through their actions. Allan Quatermain's a drug addict, the invisible man is a rapist. They're all at the nadir of the moral pendulum."

Robinson is no stranger to the world of comics. A London native, he graduated from film school and eventually became a comic book writer. Although he's written for *Batman* and *Superman* comics, Robinson is mostly known for *Starman*, an eight year project that produced about 80 issues. Between his knowledge of film and his experience in comics, Robinson was the ideal candidate to script *LXG*.

"I probably wouldn't have entered into the world of comic book writing had it not been for Alan Moore," Robinson says. "That's why when I was reading on the Internet about how terrible the script was, I would sometimes feel a bit hurt because I really respect the guy. I love his writing. I was trying to be true to the essence of his work, even if I couldn't always be true to the actual vision of it."

The movie's plot is based on a threat made in the year 1899 by Robinson's new villain, The Fantom. The British government calls upon Allan Quatermain for help.

Quatermain is summoned to Whitehall, eight floors below Piccadilly in the heart of London, and is briefed by the government's head of intelligence," explains Connery. "He is asked to round up a team than can oppose a madman bent on destruction."

That team sets out on an adventure that takes them to Africa, London, Paris, Venice, and Mongolia.

The filmmakers, while being true to the look of the comic's characters, have made other significant changes. In Moore's original work, Mina Harker, the only woman in the League, is its leader. In the film, Mina (played by *La Femme Nikita's* Peta Wilson) takes a back seat to Allan Quatermain.

This is going to sound very plebeian," Robinson says, "but when you cast Sean

Connery in a film, he becomes the leader of the film."

Handed that caveat, Robinson strove to do justice to Mina Harker. "She isn't pushed to the background as this meek little woman. She makes a reference to the fact that she doesn't have the right to vote at this point in time. She's a woman looking for independence, representing a growing sense about women's liberation that was around at that time with the suffragettes and the like."

To spice things up, Mina's character has been pushed to her darker side. Murphy notes, "In the comic, it was hinted that Mina survived Dracula and maybe has some vampiric qualities. In the movie, she's a vampire. She's climbing walls and kicking ass."

Murphy also takes pride in *LXG*'s treatment of Captain Nemo in terms of restoring his roots to India. "[Nemo] actually means 'no one' in Hindi," Murphy says. "He actually says, 'I'm Captain No One—I'm not going to tell you who I am.' [That character] somehow got perverted by Disney into James Mason. In the comic he went back to being a Hindu, and in the movie he's [played by] a huge Bollywood star [Naseeruddin Shah] from *Monsoon Wedding*, who's fantastic."

The League welcomes some new characters. Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray (Stuart Townsend) and Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer (Shane West), whose additions have stirred up criticism by the comic's fans.

But Connery has a different take. "A man like Allan Quatermain allied to Dorian Gray creates an interesting chemistry. The conflicting characters in this story are a heady mix."

Adding Tom Sawyer was Robinson's answer to a dilemma. "If you look at the comic book, it's filled with old British characters—nobody who's charismatic and will set the screen alight in terms of the American audience."

Robinson's task was to find an easily recognizable character from American literature from the same time period as the other source novels.

"Everybody on the Internet has had a huge resistance to this character," Robinson says, "because I think they imagine he's still got a corncob pipe and dirty feet from the Mississippi, and he's more interested in catfish than in saving the world.

"I recreated him as the precursor to the 1920s hard-boiled detective. He's a Secret Service agent. Now, that isn't as big a jump as it might seem, because Mark Twain wrote a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* called *Tom Sawyer, Detective*. He moves to a city and becomes a detective."

Tom Sawyer plays an important role in the League, especially in regard to its leader, Allan Quatermain.

"Once I'd made the decision to bring [Tom Sawyer] in, making him intrinsic to the thematics of the movie actually aided it," Robinson explains. "Because the movie is about Allan Quatermain coming to terms with a new century and the fact that he will not be a part of it. His time has passed.

"You then have Tom Sawyer, who represents the future, mirroring Quatermain in many ways, but also looking beyond the past and looking at what might lie ahead for the world. So you have this father son dynamic and you also have the dynamic of past and future, and one passing on the mantle on to the other. Their chemistry is a very important part of it."

Chemistry also played a role off-camera. Shane West (*A Walk to Remember*, TV's *Once and Again*) plays Tom Sawyer. He describes being both thrilled and tongue-tied during his first scene with Connery. "I had only one line in the scene, but I was standing next to Sean the whole time and was very nervous. I had been thinking about it for three weeks. And when they said 'Rolling!' I couldn't remember my line for the life of me. Thankfully it came to me just in time, and we got through it."

Connery's fellow Scotsman Tony Curran (*Gladiator*, *13th Warrior*), who plays an invisible man named Rodney Skinner, wasn't quite as shy with Connery. "I've always admired him, but was understandably apprehensive about working with someone of that stature. Turns out he's a very down-to-earth, straight up guy. And even though one of his associates told us to never imitate his voice, Jason [Flemyng, who plays Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde] and I couldn't resist. We did his lines from *Highlander* or *Untouchables* or whatever, and I think he found it amusing. He's very funny and has a dry wit. He doesn't mind cutting up with you."

Richard Roxburgh (*Moulin Rouge!*) had reason to be more nervous than his colleagues when working with Connery. Toward the end of production, Roxburgh accidentally stabbed Connery with a break-away knife. "I was having a 'Pinch me, I can't believe I'm actually here' moment acting opposite Sean," Roxburgh says, "which I was afraid would turn into a 'punch me' after the knife incident."

Another significant difference between comic and film is the world itself. Moore's comic suggests a world that's closer to alternate history than historical accuracy. For example, one panel in the comic shows a bridge spanning the English Channel—a bridge that's never been built in our world. While the movie boasts devices true to or inspired by the original literature (such as Captain Nemo's submarine from *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*), Victorian England is now closer to England as it was, as opposed to the England imagined by Moore.

Because Robinson's expertise lies in both comics and film, he is one of those rare individuals who has the experience that allows him to walk with a foot in each world. He knew changing Moore's Victorian England was necessary for movie audiences

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Fictional characters from the Victorian period join forces to battle The Fantom, who is threatening London. Shown here are Captain Nemo (Naseeruddin Shah), Tom Sawyer (Shane West), The Invisible Man (Tom Curran), and Allan Quatermain (Sean Connery)

I believe, in a film, you are allowed one 'gimme,'" Robinson explains. "When you have a series of fictional Victorian characters all coming together in a movie, that's the gimme." If you want viewers to feel invested in the movie, you have to set it in a world that they believe in, in order that the wonder of those fictional characters existing has resonance

Within a comic book, abstraction and impressionism are the bedfellows of fantastic imagery, so the readers will allow a lot more They understand the language of a fantastic world. They understand what that represents

I believe that you have to anchor a film in the real world, so the gimme,' the special thing, is a thing that people buy that has resonance. If you layer it on too much, that becomes more than people can be invested in So as a result, it's a much more believable Victorian England and a Victorian world, so that the fantastic elements—the characters, the Jules Verman devices that both Nemo and the villain have—stand out and resonate much more."

The fantastic elements aren't limited to devices. As with any major summer movie the sets that create that world are lavish Visual effects coordinator Karen Murphy says "I believe this film has more miniature effects than any film Fox has done since *Titanic*."

In addition to the miniatures, *LXG* required 58 full-size sets, including a huge exterior cityscape of the façades and rooftops of London, Paris, and Venice

The sets are fantastic and the scale of this film is epic," Connery says. "The construction and design are as good as anything I've encountered in all my years."

Stuart Townsend (*Queen of the Damned*), who plays Dorian Gray, adds, "The director, the set designer, the costume designer they've done the most incredible job bringing cartoon imagery to life This is the biggest, craziest film I've been on. It's really nuts, walking onto these sets and feeling as if you're actually in Venice or Paris Extraordinary, truly."

Enormous effort went into the creation of Captain Nemo's submarine, the *Nautilus* Built in a shipyard warehouse, the *Nautilus*'s interior looks more like an elegant hotel than a sub The goal was to bring to life author Jules Verne's original intent

Production designer Carol Spier (*Blade 2 Bloodhunt, Dracula 2000*) says, "The *Nautilus* is Nemo's world, and we wanted to introduce Hindu elements to establish a certain symbolism and spirituality to his enigmatic character Nemo is a highly principled man, reflected in the vessel's orderly, harmonic appearance."

Shah describes his character's submarine "It's like the Taj Mahal under water, beautifully white and mysterious, self-sufficient, and opulent beyond words Throughout the ship are elaborate carvings and beautiful appointments, and Nemo is very proud of both its beauty and power It is itself a character in the film, much like the spaceship in *2001 A Space Odyssey*."

The *Nautilus* set was faced with an unexpected challenge. Last August, the worst flood in 130 years struck Prague, where the film was being shot Water levels in the warehouse containing the *Nautilus* set reached 20 feet high, and nearly everything on the set was destroyed and had to be rebuilt Even worse, the warehouse served as the central production facility, so the special effects shop, props, and wardrobe were all lost

Murphy describes the flood's impact on the film "We had to shut down for a month We had to rebuild a third of our sets We had a $6 million insurance claim In this current market, you have to make sure you stake out your (release) date and don't move, otherwise everyone else will devour you We've been working on hyperdrive ever since."

Hyperdrive works *LXG* is on target to appear in theaters on July 11, flood or no flood But what does the comic's creator, Alan Moore, think of the final result?

"Kevin O'Neill, the artist, came to the set and had a rocking good time and was really impressed by the way everything looked and the way it was going and he understood what we were doing," Murphy says "You have to understand, Alan Moore has become a mate of mine, as he likes to put it Being a mate, he's a weird guy He's an extremely weird guy I think it was somebody like Updike who once said, 'I don't care what Hollywood does to my books because they're still on the table.' And Stephen King said that when we were doing *Apt Pupil*. He said, 'I hope you do a good job, but if you don't, there's still the book Alan is the extreme version of that: You want to do a movie? OK, sure, I trust you Give me some money. Thanks.' When I saw him last, which was in October of last year, he still hadn't seen *From Hell*. His wife and daughters both liked it They told him it was good. He hadn't seen it. The artist came to the premiere—Eddie Campbell really loved it But Alan has never seen the film."

Considering that Alan Moore is working on a second *LXG* volume of comics (at press time), what's the chance of a movie sequel?

"The second series of the League is about the Martian invasion," Murphy says "We'd love to do a sequel, and if we did, I'd love to do a Martian invasion Whether we'll do that or not, I don't know."

Murphy cautions readers who are faithful to the works of Alan Moore to walk into the theater with their expectations in check. "If people go expecting to have a really good time and realizing that it's inspired by the comic, I think they will If they go in expecting slavish devotion to the comic, they're not going to get that Hopefully, they'll come in and realize that we were inspired by the works of Alan Moore. A lot of things in the movie will really remind them of the comic and a lot things won't."

In fact, what Murphy likes most about the film is its resemblance to a movie that has more to do with George Lucas and Steven Spielberg than Alan Moore

"Nobody's actually tried to make a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* since the last Indiana Jones," Murphy says. "I don't know that we were consciously trying to do that, but it certainly feels that way Who doesn't love the Raiders films? I love that it feels like an Indiana Jones film. Just the sense of adventure, the sense of fun, the sense of going all over the world

"It doesn't hurt that Indiana Jones's father is in the movie." ❧

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PLAY MORE

By Kristen McDermott

Shakespeare's folklore and the English holiday cycle.

In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
With good old folks and let them tell thee tales
Of woeful ages long ago betid
(*Richard II* 5.1)

The best production of *The Tempest* I ever saw wasn't in a professional theater. It was in a grade-school auditorium, and a 20-year-old actor sat on the edge of a bare stage with a guitar. With no preamble, he started to play and sing Bob Dylan's folksong, "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." Then 10 more young actors from the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express ran onto the stage with a rope that they magically transformed into the riggings of a ship. They threw themselves around the stage making "wooshing" sounds with their mouths and thunder with their feet, and all of a sudden we were in the middle of a storm at sea.

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In Shakespeare's enchanted world of woodland faeries darker forces threaten the balance of nature

I imagine that going to the theater was a bit like this for Shakespeare's audience. The plays they watched were not original stories, but familiar ones. English history, adaptations of Italian novels and Roman comedies, retellings of ancient British legends. Playgoers in Shakespeare's time attended plays for the pleasure of hearing beloved stories well told. They also got familiar folk songs, the excitement of seeing well-trained bodies in motion, and a few special effects created out of not much more than bits of string. How did these nice little entertainments end up becoming "great" English literature?

Many fantasy writers have tried to imagine how Will Shakespeare got his gift for turning mere stories into works of wonder. Neil Gaiman, in his wonderful *Sandman* series, has young Will Shakespeare commissioned by Morpheus, the King of Dreams, to write *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be presented to Oberon, the Faery King, and his court. Morpheus confers on Will the power to bring dreams to life, on the condition that he write one more faery play (which turns out to be *The Tempest*) at his career's end. Sara Hoyt, in *Ill Met By Moonlight*, envisions a beautiful faery shape-shifter named Quicksilver, residing in the forest of Arden (just outside Stratford), as Shakespeare's male and female muse and guide to the realm of the Otherworld.

In truth, Shakespeare has almost become part of the folklore of the English-speaking world himself—his mysterious origins and awe-inspiring poetic gifts lead many to see him as a semidivine figure, little

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[illegible]

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Carnival rituals centered around the celebration of healthy appetites—the cakes and ale so deplored by Shakespeare's Malvolio

wonder that we fantasize about where such genius came from

Shakespeare was a master fantasizer himself and a few of his 38 plays feature visitations from faeries, witches, magi, airy spirits, and ghosts. Most of them, though, present earthly kingdoms that range from the legendary realms of Ancient Rome, to Athens and prehistoric Briton, to the great Renaissance courts of Venice and Vienna, and the exotic sands of Morocco and Cyprus. But why should Ophelia, noblewoman of Denmark, sing the songs of an English milkmaid? Why are there references to the Feast of St. Stephen in *King Lear*, which is set in pre-Christian England, or to St. Valentine's Day in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, set in ancient Athens? Why is a play set in the legendary middle-eastern kingdom of Illyria called *Twelfth Night*? Shakespeare's rural English background comes through in the way he embeds rural and folk holiday traditions in his plays, which generally take place anywhere *but* the English countryside.

Busy as city life was, going to the theater was a mini-holiday for many Londoners. The plays were presented in the afternoon to make use of natural light (the Globe Theater was an open-air amphitheater), so workers, students, and apprentices had to play hooky to attend. His audience was made up of a cross-section of London's population at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. Many folk were drawn to the opportunities of London from the countryside, where "partitioning" turned increasing amounts of farmland over to the more lucrative production of wool, throwing many rural farmers out of a job. Shakespeare himself was a country boy; he grew up in the market town of Stratford-on-Avon about 90 miles from London, the son and husband of prosperous farmers' daughters.

He came a long way in a few years. By the time he was 30, Shakespeare's plays were a fixture at the royal court, where they were usually presented as part of the holiday festivities stretching from Hallowmass (November 1) to Shrovetide (the beginning of Lent). Modern-day scholars are very interested in the association between drama and holidays because they believe that the medieval church feasts of Yuletide (the 12 days of Christmas) and Carnival (Mard. Gras, the day before Lent begins on Ash Wednesday) were times specially set aside for the common folk to blow off steam by mocking their social superiors. These were the days set aside to celebrate the "World Upside Down," when children and fools could lawfully pretend to be bishops and kings. The customs of these special times demanded indulgence in food and drink (because they celebrated the carnality of Christ), as well as the all-important masking or disguising.

Masks are the key element of Carnival, allowing revelers to pretend to be someone they're not, and also to protect themselves should they go a little too far. In England, holidays year-round (but especially Christmas and Midsummer) were marked by visits from masked mummers to the great houses. There, local folk would sing, gambol, and act out myths and legends, which always featured topical jokes and lampoons of the local gentry. For a brief time, the rural people were allowed to express their true feelings about the great folk while under the protection of their masks and the holiday spirit. They were even rewarded for their cheekiness with food, drink, and money, because their noble hosts knew that such "license" was only temporary, and the next day these wickedly witty performers would go back to being humble peasants.

The professional stages of Shakespeare's London were direct descendants of the mummers' plays, removed from the great houses and given homes of their own. Inside the Globe Theater historians believe, a kind of permanent Carnival took place. The audience was made up of people from many social classes, mixing together in a way they never would anyplace else in London. The actors were workingmen dressed up in borrowed finery as kings and gods. The stories the audience came to see and hear were also a hodgepodge of comedy and tragedy, history and fantasy. The language was a gallimaufry of high love poetry and crude expletives, with every other kind of English in between.

It shouldn't surprise us that the art of drama is closely tied to holiday activities. Folklorists have long drawn connections between drama and religious ritual, and religious ritual is, of course, one of the main roots of our traditional Western holiday cycle. The other source is the collection of traditions associated with the yearly calendar of planting and harvest and the greater, ever-turning cycle of birth, death, and rebirth that is the land's way of marking time. Put them together—land and church, natural rhythms and human ways of marking them—and you have a portrait of the world in which William Shakespeare was born and for which he wrote his great plays. His world was equal parts rural and urban, arcane and everyday, magic and marketplace.

Two of Shakespeare's best-loved plays actually have holidays for titles—*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*. They might have been given those titles to commemorate their first performances on those holidays—a Midsummer wedding at a noble estate, and for the Twelfth Night celebration at court. Both joyfully celebrate the giddiness of a world turned upside-down through disguises and love-play.

In *Midsummer*, four lovers and six amateur actors are pixy-led through the woods outside Athens. Mistaken identities cause chaos, not the least for Titania, the Queen of Faery, whose husband, Oberon, has charmed her so she falls in love with a common weaver named Bottom, who has been given an ass's head by the mischievous faery Puck. There's a darker confusion underlying the story though—Oberon and Titania have been separated for some time, fighting over possession of a changeling baby. Because they are earth

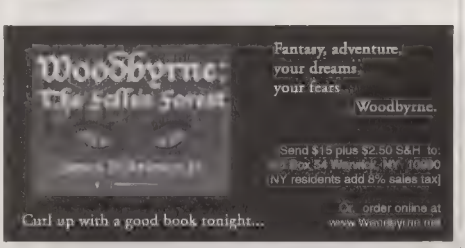
spirits, the result was frightening repercussions of the sort:

The human mortals want their winter here
No night is now with hymn or carol blest
No summer, therefore cannot have his train
Hence death, through famine, from the moist cold
The childing autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world
By their increase, now knows not which is which

Shakespeare knew that Midsummer—the Summer Solstice—was a delicate time for farmers. Poised midway between the seasons of planting and harvest, the summer weather could make or break the season's crops. Summer Solstice bonfires were not kindled to call back the sun as Winter solstice fires were but to purify land and animals from the diseases of warm weather. Urban audiences knew that summer was a perilous time in the city too—the season of plague and other contagious fogs," sucked up from the sewage-filled Thames. Watching the dancing magic spirits of the countryside putting all night through the power of love, however, was probably a welcome relief from the spirits of fever rat, and flea that haunted their own hot cramped rooms.

For another cool change, audiences loved watching Shakespeare's festive comedy *Twelfth Night* in which the world upside-down-ness of the Christmas season infects a tale that has nothing to do with Christmas. It has everything to do, though, with disguising and mumming. Viola, a shipwrecked teenager hopes to survive in the strange land of Illyria by disguising herself as a boy singer named Cesario to serve the Count Orsino. Her disguise fools everyone, probably because she learned boy's ways from her twin brother Sebastian believed lost at sea. Orsino sends her to visit the beautiful Countess Olivia and deliver his vows of love, but complications arise. Viola is a reluctant messenger, because she has fallen in love with Orsino herself, and Olivia, who doesn't love Orsino, instead falls in love with the handsome "Cesario." The gender bending humor that ensues is a classic example of the world upside-down.

As in *Midsummer* though there is a dark undertone to the holiday mirth. A subplot concerns Olivia's drunken uncle Toby Belch and his ongoing feud with her uptight butler, Malvolio. Toby and his bumbling friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, love drinking, dancing



singing, and laughter. Their partner in partying, Olivia's jester, Feste, is actually named for the spirit of festivity. When Malvolio interrupts one of their midnight songfests and threatens to tattle to Olivia, Toby snarls at him, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" With this line, we see that Malvolio represents the Puritan suspicion of Anglican church festivals, called "church ales," which, like rural celebrations, often featured freely flowing ale and sweets to attract the less-than-devout to holy services. Toby suspects Malvolio of wishing to suppress all holiday pleasure, not just his own. In this way, Malvolio plays the traditional role of the grim Winter King, who must be killed or banished for the sake of festivity.

Toby's revenge against Malvolio is swift and terrible. He tricks him into thinking Olivia is in love with him, and, when Malvolio appears before Olivia wearing an outlandish lover's getup of yellow stockings and ribbons, Olivia believes him mad and prescribes the common treatment of isolation in a dark room. Feste appears to him disguised as a priest and tries to exorcise Malvolio's demons, forcing him to confess his sinfulness. *Twelfth Night*, then, is titled for Christmas, but simultaneously reflects the activities of Carnival and Lent. Malvolio must do penance—he must become the sin-eater or scapegoat who suffers for the follies of the disguise-loving mortals around him—before the confusions about Viola's identity and who loves whom can be cleared up.

Holidays also figure prominently in plays not actually named for them. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the Jewish moneylender Shylock worries about his house's safety during the Carnival festivities in the streets.

What, are there masques?
Lock up my doors, and when you hear the drum
And the vile squealing of the wry-necked fife,
Stop my house's ears
Let no the sound of shallow foppery enter
My sober house (2.5)

He's right to worry: trashing the Jewish quarter was also a popular part of Christian celebrations of the Easter season in the anti-Semitic world of Early Modern Europe. This happens indirectly, though: a masked Venetian reveler elopes with his daughter and his moneybox.

This comedy has an even darker undertone. It concerns itself mainly with the fairy tale story of the wealthy Lady Portia, whose hand can only be won by a suitor who guesses a riddle correctly, choosing among three caskets of gold, silver, and lead for the one that contains her picture. But her favored suitor, Bassanio, has a friend named Antonio—the merchant of the title—who is in mortal danger. He has jokingly signed a contract with Shylock promising to pay him a pound of his own flesh if he can't repay a loan, and the loan has come due just as Antonio's ships have all sunk. Antonio faces certain death if Shylock—who bears a grudge against the Venetian Christian community for countless humiliations besides the loss of his daughter—won't forgive the loan.

There are many references, of course, to Christian sacrifice and the Easter season in such a story, but it also counts on the audience's familiarity with the fearful folk belief that Jews at night (and especially at Easter) became vampires, cannibals, werewolves—ravenous eaters of Christian babies and drinkers of Christian blood. Shylock is repeatedly referred to as "wolfish," calling up fears of those shape-shifting flesh-eaters. These fears overwhelm the more religious notes of the tale, and it is not by the Christian "quality of mercy," but only by another brilliant mask-ing that Antonio is saved. Portia dresses as a man and poses as a lawyer at the court hearing of Shylock and Antonio's dispute. Her disguise is completely convincing, and she wins the case, finding a loophole to free Antonio from Shylock's contract. Like Malvolio, Shylock is identified as the enemy of holiday mirth and is humiliated and banished, and the lovers are free to celebrate the life-giving pleasures of the flesh.

The carnival world shows up in the more somber context of Shakespeare's great tragedy, *King Lear*. This, too, is a world upside-down, where a father—the mythic King Lear—banishes his favorite daughter for failing to brag about her love for him, and a loving son is condemned to death because his illegitimate brother accuses him of plotting to murder his own father. For Shakespeare, the darkest dark side to the merry world of Carnival was the possibility that even our most sacred ties of love and respect could be jettisoned.

The dismayed and frightened voice of this particular world is that of Lear's jester. He is the opposite of *Twelfth Night*'s Feste—where Feste mocks fools who are too rigid and too serious, Lear's Fool mocks the King for failing to respect the natural order of things:

LEAR: *When were you wont to be so full of songs, sirrah?*

FOOL: *I have used it, nuncle, ever since thou madest thy daughters thy mothers, for when thou gavest them the rod, and put'st down thine own breeches,*
Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep,
And go the fools among (1.4)

The Fool's voice is the voice of the powerless who fear the damage the powerful can do when they begin to lose their grip on sanity. Lear has given his crown to his two remaining daughters and trusts them to give him a home. However, they refuse unless he gives up his royal retinue of servants and soldiers, and the proud Lear prefers to be homeless. The Fool follows the King across a stormy wasteland, crying from cold and exhaustion, but unwilling to leave his master alone. The "good and faithful servant" who wastes his life in the service of a man who doesn't appreciate him is, in this play, accompanied by a number of references to St. Stephen's Day—the day after Christmas, nowadays called Boxing Day, when traditionally the great reward the lowly for their service.

We know that this play was actually performed before King James on December 26, 1606, whoever chose the plays for royal performances had a keen sense of their folk significance.

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Masks allowed medieval performers to mock their masters safely in their mumming plays and rituals.

nificance Stephen's feast was traditionally the day of the Christmas season associated with "good housekeeping" and charity. Great folk were reminded by carols such as "Good King Wenceslaus" (who brought food and fire to a poor man "on the Feast of Stephen") to share their Christmas plenty with the poor, and the "poor boxes" were opened in the churches. The begging on this day could get fairly aggressive, and rich manors hastened to avoid being labeled a "hard house," subject to "forced giving."

King Lear and his Fool are turned away from Lear's daughter's house and sent into a winter storm—the reverse of the Wenceslaus legend. Popular sayings insisted, "Blessed be St. Stephen/There's no fast upon his even," and King James I, who valued traditional customs highly, even made hospitality on this day a law. But Lear's daughters violently break this law, refusing shelter not just to the poor, but to their own father.

The Fool sees where this is headed with tragically wise eyes:

> *When nobles are their tailors' tutors*
> *No heretics burn'd, but wenches' suitors,*
> *When usurers tell their gold i' the field,*
> *And bawds and whores do churches build,*
> *Then shall the realm of Albion*
> *Come to great confusion.*
> *This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time.* (3.2)

Referring to the legend of Arthur, the "King under the Hill," the Fool knows that the breaking of this King means the breaking of the land.

A popular centerpiece of the Christmas season, the "Feast of Fools" also began on St. Stephen's Day and lasted until December 28 (the Massacre of the Holy Innocents). The focus of this three-day holiday-within-a-holiday was Christianity's message of hope for the weak and powerless, but many popular traditions grew up around this festival to take advantage of the Church's temporary tolerance—even celebration—of foolish and chaotic behavior. The "Lord of Misrule," chosen in rural and urban observances of this festival, presided over mummings, dances, drinking games, and songs, his purpose being to encourage chaos and silliness.

This is exactly what Lear becomes after he abdicates his responsibilities as King. His thoughtless division of the kingdom opens the door to chaos and mayhem as his two daughters plot against one another and his third daughter brings an army from France to challenge them. Lear's madness in the storm becomes an outward symbol of the misrule he has unleashed on the land. But even King Lear, in his madness, gains some of the Fool's perspective:

> *Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,*
> *That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,*
> *How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,*
> *Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you*
> *From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en*
> *Too little care of this!* (3.4)

Realizing at last that the poor suffer most for the sins of the great, he admits he has been careless. He has lost a kingdom, but has gained much needed compassion for the common folk.

Shakespeare's audience would have been particularly moved by this plot. Many of them were, like Shakespeare himself, young folk who had to leave home and family to seek their fortunes in the city. Living in an impersonal metropolis may well have made people long for the security, however patronizing, of the manor and the farm, where people knew their place and strong customs demanded that the rich look after the poor. In London, of course, the poor disappeared from sight into dark alleys and tumbledown tenements, while the wealthy kept to their banqueting halls and never saw the people who washed their clothes or groomed their horses. The countryside's sense of community disappeared, and *King Lear* offers a poignant metaphor for the chaos that occurs rapidly when those on top forget their duties to those on the bottom.

Such tales inserted popular holiday associations into mythic settings in order to help their audience connect with a deep well of shared history and national identity. *King Lear* is a tale from England's preliterate legends; its plot is drawn from the ancient tales, "Cap O' Rushes" and "Love Like Salt," both of which deal with a daughter's love for her undeserving father. Evoking the day of St. Stephen—with its equal share of church and folk elements—Shakespeare creates a sense of continuity between ancient hearthside tales and newfangled church-and-town customs.

Sometimes Shakespeare took the opposite strategy, depicting country customs onstage for the amusement of his courtly audience members. One of his late plays, *The Winter's Tale*, evokes the custom of tale-telling by the fireside at the death of the year. Such tales are often about suffering and redemption, and this one is no different. A well-respected King, Leontes, takes the sudden notion that his pregnant wife, Hermione, has slept with his best friend, who is making a winter holiday visit. Enraged, Leontes publicly accuses Hermione and sends her to prison, where she apparently dies of grief after giving birth to a girl, Perdita. The maddened King orders that the baby girl be killed, but his servant, unwilling to do such a horrible deed, merely leaves the girl at the seashore to be adopted by a common shepherd.

When we next see our fairy tale lost princess, 16 years have passed and she is about to be crowned Queen of the Sheep-Shearing festival. In England, the traditional date of this festival was around June 5—this is a feast of high summer in spite of the play's wintry title. A couple of courtly visitors come by to watch the charming country festivities, and Perdita (who has no idea that she's a princess) greets the visitors in the deeply coded language of flowers.

> *Reverend sirs.*
> *For you there's rosemary and rue; these keep*
> *Seeming and savour all the winter long.*
> *Grace and remembrance be to you, both,*
> *And welcome to our shearing!* (4.4)

Oddly, she offers winter herbs. The visitors comment that her choice was a gracious reference to their own mature years, but Perdita answers that, since it's high summer, her favored spring flowers are gone, and the only available garden flowers are "our carnations and streak'd gillyvors,/Which some call nature's bastards." She then offers a more appropriate herbal bouquet:

> *Here's flowers for you,*
> *Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram,*
> *The marigold, that goes to bed wi' the sun*
> *And with him rises weeping: these are flowers*
> *Of middle summer, and I think they are given*
> *To men of middle age. You're very welcome.* (4.4)

The "language of flowers" has a long tradition made up of equal parts folk and classical sources. The bouquet Perdita offers comments wittily on the place, season, and celebration at hand. Lavender and mint are herbs used to preserve fleeces from insects, but they are also known as "hot" herbs in reference to

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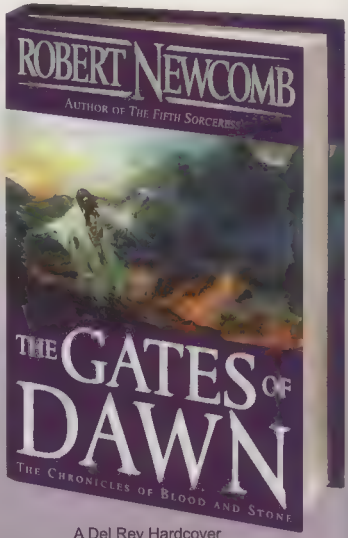

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the doctrine of humors. All living things, in this system, are made up of a combination of hot and cold, wet and dry elements. "Hot" herbs have properties to counteract the "coldness" of winter, age, and other "cold" maladies such as melancholy or rheumatism. Savory and marjoram in particular were herbs of love—even aphrodisiacs—and often part of bridal bouquets, as were mint and lavender. The marigold's Latin name is *calendula*, and it was believed that this flower constantly turned its head to the sun, tracking it through the day. A herbal timekeeper, it was associated with the cycle of the year.

Perdita, the Winter child and Summer Queen, wears so elaborate a garland that she is compared to Flora, goddess of Spring, clothed all in flowers—though it's late summer. In this play, she represents Time, which is so easily lost (*perditus* in Latin) by the careless. There are a number of seasonal mix-ups in her presentation—maybe Shakespeare was subtly poking fun at his courtly audience, who probably wouldn't know enough about the countryside to notice the inconsistencies. Or perhaps Perdita, a winter-born child, views both the spring and summer symbols with suspicion, and feels more comfortable with the wintry qualities of wisdom, introspection, judgment, and high rhetoric.

The important thing is that Perdita, a noblewoman even if she doesn't know it, has a classical, courtly approach to the language of flowers. Her loving foster-father, however, admits she's not much of a country hostess:

> *Fie, daughter! when my old wife lived upon*
> *This day she was both pantler, butler, cook,*
> *Both dame and servant, welcomed all, served all,*
> *Would sing her song and dance her turn, now here,*
> *At upper end o' the table, now i' the middle*
> *On his shoulder, and his, her face o' fire*
> *With labour and the thing she took to quench it,*
> *She would to each one sip. You are retired*
> *As if you were a feasted one and not*
> *The hostess of the meeting.*
> *Come, quench your blushes and present yourself*
> *That which you are, mistress o' the feast. Come on,*
> *And bid us welcome to your sheep-shearing,*
> *As your good flock shall prosper.* (4.4)

Perdita may look the part of the Queen of the Sheep-Shearing, but she neglects the homely duties of cooking, hostessing, drinking, and even dancing on the table. These activities, of course, were necessary for the "good flock" to "prosper"—in the folk ritual of sympathetic magic, the Queen of the Flock needed to enhance her own fertility to ensure that of the sheep! The "hotness" or appropriateness of the bouquet was not nearly as important as the sexual attractiveness of the Shearing Queen. Perdita carries the floral symbols of fertility, but is hesitant to engage in activities like dancing and drinking that so often lead to more "fertile" activities.

It's as if Perdita knows at some level that her rural identity is really a disguise. She herself seems uncomfortable with her "goddess-like" getup. She notes that she's acting like Whitsuntide (May 15) players, perhaps because she's wearing a costume. "sure this robe of mine/Does change my disposition." The Whitsuntide players and morris-dancers often dressed as "green-men" or wild forest men, and wore bells and garlands of ivy and greens as they danced—in fact, the party features "... dance of satyrs, classical figures of fertility. These dancers were often in rude, perhaps it's the bawdy aspect of Whitsun-players that makes Perdita nervous about looking like one.

Her fears are well-founded. The shepherd she loves and dances with is a disguised prince, and his father, the King of Bohemia (one of the elderly visitors, himself in disguise), angrily forbids his son to marry a common shepherdess. Perdita distressed, promises "... I'll not to bed." But milk my ewes and weep."

Because this is a fairy tale, though, all comes right in the end. *The Winter's Tale* is designed for a courtly audience, so its folk elements are "tamed" into the mere setting of sheep-shearing and flower-gathering. Perdita is quickly removed from her adopted home, because the values of this tale are the courtly ones of contemplation, forgiveness, self-control, loyalty, and seeing through disguises. The tale soon returns to the court of the penitent Leontes, where Perdita is reunited with her family and her shepherd-prince, and forgets her childhood in the country.

> *Now I want*
> *spirits to enforce, art to enchant,*
> *And my ending is despair*
> *Unless I be redeemed by prayer.* (*The Tempest*, Epilogue)

The Winter's Tale is a rare "courtly" play for Shakespeare, although his plays were often performed at court. It seems clear that his intended audience was the average Londoner. In his final play, Shakespeare creates a magician named Prospero who, with nothing but magical words, has ". . . *bedimmed*
> *The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,*
> *And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault*
> *Set roaring war . . . Graves at my command*
> *Have waked their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth*
> *By my so potent art.* (5.1)

However, after getting his enemies to admit their wrongs to him and finding his daughter a suitably princely husband, he gives up his "rough magic" in favor of a return to court. This is not a happy choice, he notes that, once he leaves the island, "My every third thought will be my grave." Shakespeare, who would shortly take his theatrical profits and retire to Stratford to be a wealthy landlord, was probably equally ambivalent about leaving the stage for a quieter, soberer, more contemplative life. He only lasted three years as a courtly gentleman; it seems that his heart was back with his "spirits" in the London theaters.

Shakespeare, the master tale-teller, knew that his audience was made up of people who, like him, both hated and loved their city. In smoky, crowded London, it must have been difficult to see the sun or to experience the change of season as vividly as in the country. Shakespeare offered his playgoers a temporary taste of holiday pleasures, reminders of the rural cycle of the year. His references to such holidays became an effective way to create emotional depth in stories whose plots were familiar and whose themes might otherwise be awe inspiring or even depressing. Literally evoking tales told by the hearth, at a mother's knee, he forged a link between the folklore and the historic, between the personal and the political. We may no longer "get" all the references, we may no longer ourselves be in touch with the rural rituals that his plays invoke, but like Shakespeare's audience, we yearn to be part of a larger story, to put down roots into the past. His plays give us that chance to connect with the stones that make us human. ❧

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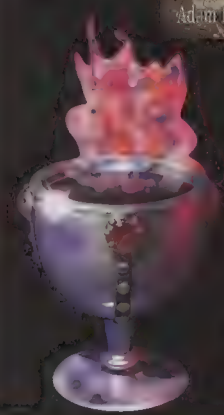

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Harry Potter and the Amazing Success Story.

Believe me when I say I do not mean to disparage nor in any way belittle the rich imagination shown in the Harry Potter books. They are deliciously rich in wonders, packed full of all kinds of magic, stuffed with Wizards and Monsters and Animals of astounding bizarreness, and positively bulging with incredible adventures, but every now and then when I enter a book shop and see an entire wall of it filled with Potter books and books based on Potter books and calendars and lockable diaries likewise based or wander into a toy store and discover a full fourth of it stuffed with stuffed Potter dolls and Potter block sets and Potter games, I very seriously wonder if the true life story of what happened after J.K. Rowling thought up Muggles and Quidditch is not a tale fantastic enough to challenge if not totally outdistance anything to be found in the entire Potter saga.

J.K. Rowling's mind may have been linguistically bent in the proper direction when she was born in the Chipping Sodbury Hospital in Bristol, and the happy tendency was reinforced when her family later relocated to Tutshill near Chepstow in the Forest of Dean.

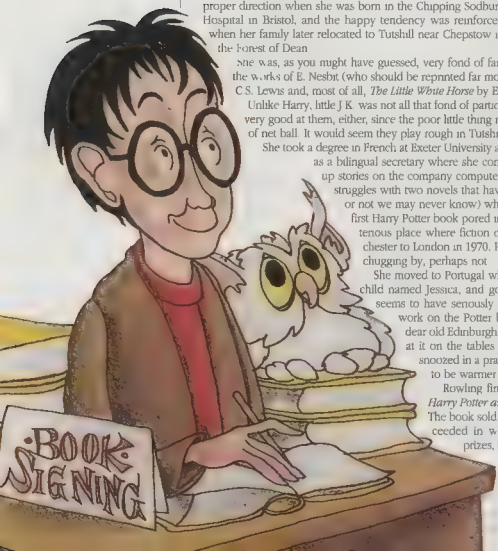
She was, as you might have guessed, very fond of fantastic books when a little girl and loved the works of E. Nesbit (who should be reprinted far more often than she is), the Narnia series by C.S. Lewis and, most of all, *The Little White Horse* by Elizabeth Goudge.

Unlike Harry, little J.K. was not all that fond of participating in team sports and apparently not very good at them, either, since the poor little thing managed to break her arm during a game of net ball. It would seem they play rough in Tutshill near Chepstow.

She took a degree in French at Exeter University and then worked at Amnesty International as a bilingual secretary where she confesses she spent most of her time typing up stories on the company computer. She completely dropped them and her struggles with two novels that have never been published (whether wisely or not we may never know) when most of the characters and plot of the first Harry Potter book pored into her head out of that strange and mysterious place where fiction comes during a long train trip from Manchester to London in 1970. Perhaps a shiny little red train went busily chugging by, perhaps not.

She moved to Portugal where she married a local journalist, had a child named Jessica, and got divorced, but none of those activities seems to have seriously gotten got in the way of her continuing work on the Potter book. When she left Portugal to settle in dear old Edinburgh, she continued to famously scribble away at it on the tables of coffee houses while daughter Jessica snoozed in a pram beside her as those cozy places tended to be warmer than their wee apartment.

Rowling finally finished the book and in June 1997 *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was published. The book sold amazingly from the start, and after it succeeded in winning an astounding accumulation of prizes, the editorial director of an American publisher realized it was a genuine phenomenon well worth acquiring at whatever cost and bought the U.S. rights for a record smashing $105,000.00,



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And it continues to work, not only unabated but with vastly increasing power. Since it shows no signs whatsoever of flagging and many of growing ever stronger, one is almost afraid to speculate on what the exact situation will be by the time Rowling finishes her seventh and terminal volume in the series—which has all along been her publicly announced plan—and we see Harry Potter and the Final Book hit the the shelves and children yet unborn eagerly crowding one another aside to purchase their very own copy.

The thing that pleases me more than anything else about the truly astounding success of these books is that it has completely and devastatingly demolished once and forevermore the endlessly repeated moanings of countless pundits who, before the arrival of this extraordinary event, would make doleful appearances on innumerable television and radio programs and write stacks of columns in magazines and newspapers in order to sigh gloomily (but with secret joy) over the arrival of the Doom of Books.

Their basic thesis was that "children these days"—I hate (no weaker word will do) people who speak of "children these days" and always have from when I was a child those days myself—had, because of their tragic addiction to electronic diversions such as violence on TV and computer games, sadly become less bright from the supposedly purer and simpler times when the pundits were children. Because of this dreadful modern curse, neither these poor damaged young creatures nor any of their descendants would ever again be interested in, or even be able to, read books. After this, the reporters who had inter viewed these solemn nannies would turn to look at us from the TV screens of our sets and sadly shake their heads.

But that s all over.

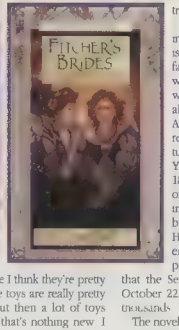
Another thing that pleases me very much about Harry Potter's great success is that it will clearly stimulate his brighter readers and lead them to investigate other books, beginning perhaps with the books that got J.K. Rowling started (again I'm particularly happy to plug E. Nesbit's wonderful work) and then going on to try some of the superb contemporary writers in fantasy skilfully aimed at younger readers, such as Philip Pullman's marvelous three-volume series *His Dark Materials* which includes *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*. I think this might very well end up being a far better world if lots and lots of kids these days (who strike me as a very bright batch, by the way) read their Philip Pullman

I admit I do have a few minor complaints but in light of the above I think they're pretty small stuff. Some of the toys are really pretty tacky, for example, but then a lot of toys always have been, so that's nothing new. I would think the visible desperation and pathetic lack of purpose outside of profit in some of the spinoff books must be desperately embarrassing to their authors, but that's their business and, so far as I know, it is completely legal to do such things.

I must regretfully admit I am disappointed in both of the film versions of Harry so far. They have first rate casts and a number of really nice scenes here and there, but they somehow always fail to come together. Also, considering the free wheeling spirit of the books, they strike me as being oddly timid and cautious. Also, it's a great pity for them that they have had the dreadful bad luck of simultaneously coming out with releases of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy which is not only a towering achievement of cinematic fantasy but is fortunate in containing nigh unbelievable and revolutionary special effects. Maybe after *The Return of the King* has come and gone, they'll be a little less traumatized and perk up with the rest of the Harrys.

In any case, it's wonderful to see all those kids in the bookstores!

Gahan Wilson



The number seven is an auspicious number in fairy tales, so it's only fitting that **Fitcher's Brides,** a superior new historical fantasy by Gregory Frost (Tor, NY, hardcover, 400 pp., $25.95, ISBN 0-765-30194-6), should be the seventh title in award-winning editor and anthologist Terri Windling's acclaimed Fairy Tale Series. "In the Fairy Tale Series," she explains in her Introduction, "some of the finest writers today are going back to the older versions of tales and reclaiming them for adult readers, reworking their themes into original highly unusual fantasy novels."

Windling's introduction is packed with fascinating facts, observations, and insights, but if you're in the mood for an inventive and intelligent adult fantasy, as opposed to a fairy tale scavenger hunt, do yourself a favor and treat it as an afterword.

Anyway, all you need to know is in the jacket copy. *Fitcher's Brides* is drawn primarily from two classic fairy tales, "Bluebeard" and the less well known "Fitcher's Birds" (to which Frost's title punningly alludes), and from 19th-century American history—specifically, the religious revivals and wacky spiritual fads that swept upstate New York throughout the early to mid-1800s. Frost makes use of two bits of history in particular: the founding of modern Spiritualism in 1848 by the three Fox sisters of Hydesville, NY, who claimed to literally "rap" with spirits, and preacher William Miller's prophecy that the Second Coming would occur on October 22, 1844, a prediction credited by thousands until October 23, 1844.

The novel, set in 1843, opens with the three young Charter girls, Vernelia, Amy, and Katherine, traveling with their father and stepmother, Lavinia, to the upstate New York town of (nudge, wink) Jekyll's Glen. Mr. Charter is to serve as gatekeeper for Harbinger, a community of the spiritually elect established some miles from town by Reverend Elias Fitcher Fitcher, a dark-bearded man of commanding physical presence and spellbinding oratorical gifts, is gathering his flock in anticipation of Judgment Day, which he says is imminent. On that day, only those within the gates of Harbinger will be saved.

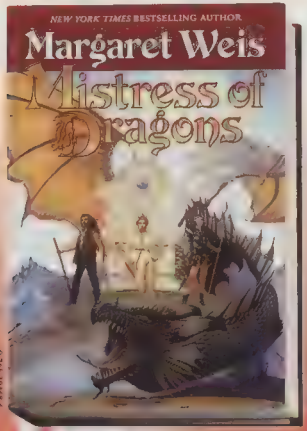
After moving into their new home, the girls discover a ghost who communicates with them by rapping upon the walls of their bedroom. The ghost tells the eldest sister, Vern, to expect a suitor, and in short order the charismatic Fitcher himself requests and receives her hand in marriage. Vern moves to Harbinger with her new husband, who gives her as a wedding present an egg of white marble that she must keep with her always. He also shows her a set of keys to every door in the community, when he is away gathering new sheep to the fold, she will have charge of the keys, all of which she will be free to use—except one: a key made of clear glass.

It doesn't take a degree in fairy tale studies to know what Vern does the next time Fitcher leaves Harbinger, nor what fate befalls her. Back at chez Charter, the ghost is soon rapping on the bedroom wall again. Now it's the middle sister, Amy, who is promised a suitor—Fitcher again, conveniently free to remarry. Like Vern, Amy receives egg and keys from her husband. Then, on the very eve of Judgment Day, it's young Kate's turn.

Making artful use of the grim inevitability of fairy tale logic, which is also (and by no means coincidentally) present in nightmares, Frost delivers riveting suspense as each sister marches off to her blood-drenched destiny amid the sincere but creepily fervid folk of Harbinger. Frost retains the primal vigor of his

The New York Times Bestselling Author and Co-Creator of Dragonlance Presents An All-New Fantasy Realm—The Dragonvarld

Margaret Weis
Mistress of Dragons



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source materials, and maintains as well the overlay of Christian elements so often found in fairy tales, while adding more modern touches, the most obvious being the psychological and symbolic sophistication that is one of Freud's greatest legacies, augmented by the no less brilliant and necessary feminist-inspired revisionism of Angela Carter and others. Fitcher, in the role of Bluebeard, walks a tightrope between realism and fantasy, and not always gracefully, now displaying the cool suavity or sudden suspicions of a psychopath, now a rage that is literally demonic. He is, in the end, an enigma, as evil perhaps must be. Frost's real triumph lies in his three sisters Vern, Amy, and Kate are marvelously realized and distinct, each ringing true to her time and to herself. These deeply felt, sympathetically imagined young women make *Fitcher's Brides* a memorably human tale.

Fairy tales are never far from the work of Charles de Lint, the World Fantasy Award-winning author of, among other books, *Jack the Giant-Killer*, an earlier volume in Windling's Fairy Tale Series. His new collection, **Tapping the Dream Tree** (Tor, NY, hardcover, 341 pp., $26.95, ISBN: 0312-87401-4), gathers 18 tales set in and around the fictional town of Newford, all but one previously published.

De Lint brings an odd sensibility to these smoothly told stories, which, in addition to a location, share an extended cast of multicultural characters, a skillful use of musical motifs, and a fondness for homespun wisdom that all too often curdles into cliché. While much urban fantasy, taking its cue from John Crowley's great novel *Little, Big*, shows the realm of faerie casting its glamour, for good or ill, upon the mundane world, de Lint turns this around completely. Again and again in these Newford tales, it is the mundane that bewitches the fantastic, as in "Pixel Pixies," where a bob named Dick Bobbins, who lives in the basement of Holly Rue's used book store, defends her hearth against cyberpunk pixies by exchanging his reclusive, peripatetic ways for human virtues of companionship and trust. Or in the long novella "Seven Wild Sisters," where the queen of the bee fairies is slain by her own guards for behaving vindictively toward a mortal. By the testimony of the old tales, eldritch creatures are bound to and by their natures, and change is a blessing or curse reserved for humans. In de Lint's radical revisionings, the realms of faerie (as well as those of myth and legend) are thoroughly colonized by the mundane—gentrified if you will—and to a large extent de-enchanted. Oh, there's still magic, but somehow it's diminished from what, once upon a time, it was. Just as in the *Harry Potter* books, where J.K. Rowling celebrates in every line the muggleness she pretends to scorn, thus winning a vast audience of muggles, de Lint taps into age-old human resentments and fears of faerie and writes of fair folk who suffer from a gigantic case of genius envy: They want to be like us.

I knew I was in for a treat when, blithely reading along in the eponymous lead story of **The Ogre's Wife** (Obscura Press, trade paperback, 270 pp., $18.95, ISBN: 0-9659569-5-4), by Richard Parks, I came upon the line: "'You suppose correctly,' the ogre said just before he ate her kitten." If there is one thing sure to bring a smile to the face of a jaded book reviewer, it is the conspicuous consumption of a kitty cat.

Like Frost and de Lint, Parks draws deeply from the well of fairy tales, thus impressively diverse collection of 15 previously published stories, many of which first appeared in the pages of this magazine, is subtitled *Fairy Tales for Grownups*, an epithet that applies even to the handful of stories with science fictional trappings. Why grownups? Because these tales (mostly) refuse the easy, consoling lies of happily ever after. Parks' characters may win their heart's desire, but their happiness is shaded by the mature wisdom that comes with sacrifice and loss. In "Golden Bell, Seven, and the Marquis of Zeng," for example, a young man seeking magical assistance to save the woman he loves must pay for it with the ability to love. It seems paradoxical that the prevalence of such hard choices throughout these deceptively light-hearted stories—for humans, fey, and gods alike—should infuse the best of them with a gentle, fable-like charm, but that is indeed the case.

Michael N. Stanton is a professor of English literature at the University of Vermont, where he has been teaching *LOTR* for over 30 years.

Hobbits, Elves, and Wizards: Exploring the Wonders and Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (Palgrave Macmillan, NY, trade paperback, 202 pp., $12.95, ISBN: 1-4039-6025-9), first published in 2001 and now hurriedly revised and reissued, testifies to his familiarity with the novel and the criticism and scholarship surrounding it. The book's chief virtue lies in its cogent incorporation and explication of material from *The Silmarillion*, *The Book of Lost Tales*, and other posthumously published and less widely read works of Tolkien's. Stanton breaks no new ground, but readers looking for a dependable guide to *LOTR* and its vast and often-confusing back story will be well-served by this modest volume. ❧

Paul Witcover

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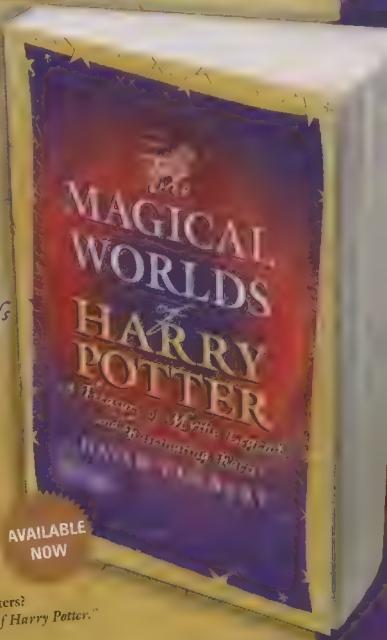

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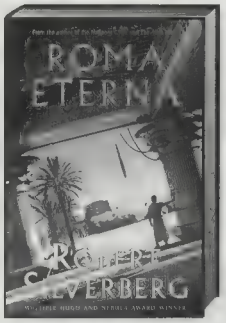

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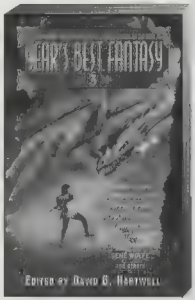

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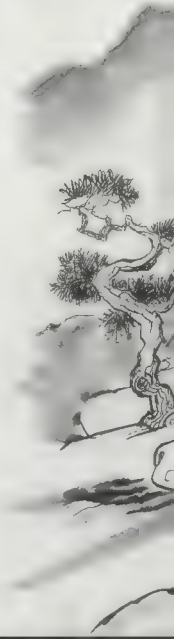
Worshipping Small Gods



ONCE UPON A CERTAIN TIME IN A CERTAIN ANCIENT LAND THERE WERE gods of all sorts. Large gods, small gods, beautiful gods, ugly gods. Gods of fields and gods of roadways, gods of pestilence and gods of healing, gods of mountains and gods of swamps. Gods who kept pretty much to themselves and accepted no more than the occasional offering, and that mostly to remind themselves that they were, in fact, gods, even if knowing this did little to change either their behavior or personal grooming.

Makoto was one of the latter. His main opinion on being a god was that it was no great thing. In fact, so far as Makoto was concerned the only thing possibly worse was to be either a human or a Saint and, while humans were simply little different from any other animal, Saints were a category of "unpleasant" all unto themselves.

Saints were something new in that ancient land and Makoto wasn't really sure what to make of them; he had seen a few and could only wonder at what strange creatures they were. Men and yet not just men. Either almost gods or beyond gods. Powerful, capricious, serving some personal view of an "Enlightenment" or "Transcendence," ideas that they didn't really seem to understand and so interpreted as they saw fit.

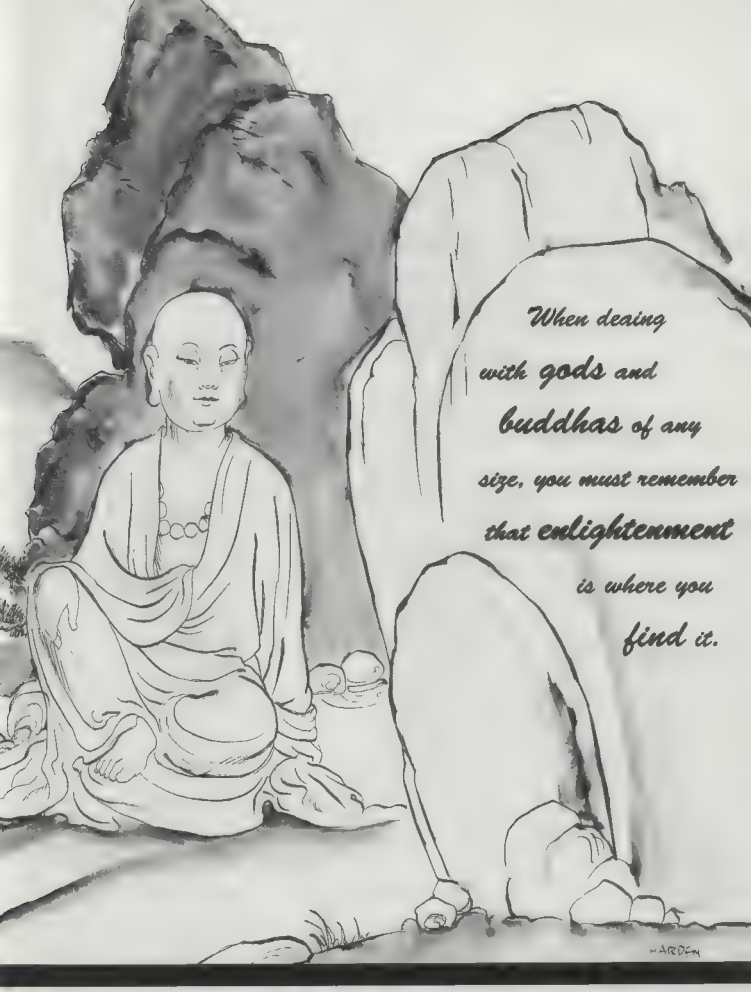
In short, Saints were trouble.

Knowing this, Makoto perhaps should have been more prepared that fine spring day. He lay on a rock on his mountain, sunning himself as was his custom. The Saint appeared on that faintest of paths that led the occasional human up to make offerings.

Funny thing about Saints. They smelled human. They even *looked* human, though they did tend to dress funny and shave their heads and wear large strings of wooden beads that forever clacked as they walked. Makoto recognized the smell and so thought nothing amiss until the Saint walked right up to Makoto's rock and bound him there. The Saint did it in the Name of an Idea. A very powerful idea, apparently. He called it Shaka.

Makoto looked down at the gleaming golden strands of pure light that shackled him. "Ummm, excuse me? Why have you done this?"

By Richard Parks Illustration By Laurie Harden


When dealing
with gods and
buddhas of any
size, you must remember
that enlightenment
is where you
find it.
HARDEN

IDEAS MAY BE POWERFUL THINGS BUT THEY DO CHANGE OVER TIME. SO DO MOUNTAINS, COME TO THAT.

"The buddha Shaka demands a bridge from this mountain peak to the next. You're going to build it."

"Ummm . . . Why would this 'Shaka' want such a thing, and why would I do such a thing?"

THE WILL OF SHAKA IS NOT FOR YOU OR me to question. You will do this because I'll bind you to this rock forever if you don't." The Saint didn't smile. They tended not to, except when they did. It was all very confusing. Makoto longed for the days before the Saints came. Life was simpler for a god then.

Makoto sighed. "I am a mountain god. I am very strong. This thing you bind me with is an idea. Ideas may be powerful things but they do change over time, in my experience. So do mountains, come to that, but at a much slower pace. Sooner or later this thing that binds me will change in a way that is not a binding, or it will move in such a way that I do not move with it. Either way I will be free. I tell you that I will not build a bridge; I like my mountains as they are. Go away."

The Saint seemed to consider this. "Well, if a relatively mutable thing will not do, then I will take your advice and go for something less changeable. Be a rock."

Makoto was a rock. It happened from one moment to the next, as soon as the Saint said the word "rock."

This is very interesting, Makoto thought. Being a god as well as a rock, thinking was not very difficult. And it wasn't exactly a new thing to be of the mountain, since he was after all a mountain god.

"I hear your thoughts," the Saint said. "And I know you can hear me. Will you build my bridge now?"

A rock can build nothing. You might, perhaps, make a bridge out of me instead, now that I am a boulder, but I don't think it would reach the next mountain.

"You are a stubborn creature," the Saint said, "but I am patient. I will be back."

The Saint left the mountain then, which Makoto considered a very good thing for him to do. As the days then passed Makoto came to realize that life was not so very different as a stone. He still sunned himself on pleasant days. He did not seek shelter from the wind or storm when the weather was inclement but, being a god, he had never done those things in the first place. In fact, being a stone had much to recommend it. He wanted for nothing, neither food nor water nor company. It was true that company was something he had very seldom wanted, but seldom did not mean never and yet his solitude was assured, even forced, by his very nature. Now his desires matched his nature perfectly and Makoto was, for the first time he could remember, perfectly content rather than merely almost so.

Once a month for a considerable period of time that Makoto, as a stone, barely noticed, the Saint returned to Makoto's mountain. This visit would always coincide with the new moon. The Saint would sit in that funny cross-legged position that the Saints had named after a flower—though in Makoto's opinion it more resembled the legs of a dead beetle—and he would stare at the large stone that was Makoto for a very long time. "Well?" he would finally ask, "are you ready to build the bridge now?"

No, Makoto would think, loud enough to be sure that the Saint could hear him. After a while the Saint would simply rise and walk back down the mountain. On the next new moon he would be back. Makoto did notice a few more wrinkles in the Saint's face as time wore on: he seemed to recall that the Saint had been quite a young man when he'd first appeared.

This went on for some time, yet there finally came a day when the Saint came and there was something a bit different about him. He seemed, well, tired. Yet nothing changed in the first part of his ritual. He sat down in his dead beetle position and he stared at Makoto the Stone.

"Well?" he asked. "are you ready to build my bridge now?"

No, Makoto thought, and waited for the Saint to leave so he could get back to sunning himself in peace as he usually did except during the rainy season. This time the Saint didn't leave.

"We've been doing this for a long time now," the Saint said.

Makoto would have shrugged, if he'd had shoulders. *I suppose.*

"You must realize by now that you cannot escape Shaka's will. You will build his bridge or remain a stone forever."

I'm sure that's true, was Makoto's cheerful thought, and why not? It seemed an excellent arrangement so far as he was concerned. He only wished he knew what to say to the Saint to make him go away again. He always had before. Yet still the Saint sat there on the rocks and bristly grass, staring at him, and he would not go away.

"I've tried," the Saint said finally. "I've practiced my meditation and I have contemplated this stubborn rock for what seems an eternity, and yet I must confess: I do not understand."

Perhaps I can help, Makoto thought. Any thing to get rid of the pesky fellow.

"You can build the bridge," the Saint said. "That would help." He actually looked annoyed. That was new.

Makoto sighed, or at least remembered what it was like to do so. *I won't build your bridge.*

"Why not?"

Because I don't want to build a bridge. I like the mountains the way they are. Wasn't I clear on that point from the start?

The Saint looked unhappy. "It doesn't matter what you or I want! The buddha Shaka was very specific."

Who is this "Shaka" you're always on about?

The Saint glared at him. "The Enlightened One!" He has seen through all the world's falseness, rid himself of his physical desires, become One with the Infinite!"

Makoto considered this. *That's very impressive. So why does he want a bridge? Isn't that a desire, of sorts?*

The Saint just stared at him for a moment. Then, "It's not for me to question!"

Then who is it for?

The Saint frowned deeply and looked as if he were about to say something, then he shook his head and let out a gusting breath. Makoto thought that, perhaps, what the Saint said then was something different from what he had started to say.

"My mission is still clear. I meditated on the Lotus Sutra for seven years, and at the end of those seven years the Buddha came to me in a dream and directed me to come to your mountain and command you to build the bridge I spoke of. He said it would bring me to Enlightenment."

I'm assuming Enlightenment is a place you wish to be?

"It's not a 'place' but, yes, more than anything."

MAKOTO THOUGHT ABOUT THIS for a moment. *Yet another desire, but no matter. Shaka never commanded you to build a bridge. He commanded you to tell*

Continued on page 92

CONTINUED

Alan Smale • Illustration by Mary LaRue Wells

KRISTIN with CAPRICE

Sometimes a couple needs a fresh start. If you can't get to Paris, perhaps some goats will do…

He did not ring the bell. Strange enough to have to knock on his own front door, when the key was in his pocket. He heard a strange bleating sound from within, quickly suppressed. Then footsteps, and his heart began to thump a little harder.

Kristin opened the door and stared at him. Her hair was in a bandanna and she wore an old softball tee shirt. Around her eyes were traces of yesterday's makeup. House cleaning, then. Scrubbing away the last of him.

She looked so gorgeous he wanted to cry.

"I came for my things," he said.

"If you'd called, I could have been out." She stood aside to let him in. Reluctantly.

"That's not necessary," said Paul. "You don't have to do that. You look great."

"Yes, it is," she replied. "Yes, I do. No, I really don't. Your stuff's in the spare." She walked into the kitchen and he heard the strange squeal again. Perhaps the sound of a sponge against the inside of the oven?

His apartment—not his any longer—was a living room plus a separate kitchen, a main bedroom and a spare room, and a bathroom. Twelve hundred square feet, yet when he'd shared it with Kristin it had not been too small. Not until the Ice Age of their final month.

Much of the living room furniture was new. The beanbag chair with the tassels was particularly unnerving. He'd told her she could keep his furniture, and she'd moved it out anyway. He didn't see a single lamp, CD, or knick-knack that was his. In fact, it seemed that in expunging him, she'd taken the opportunity to clear out a load of her own junk too. The room looked spare and healthy and feminine, and Paul was an alien here. He did not linger.

The spare room held seven large cardboard boxes, an empty bookcase, and a litter box. On the top of the pile of boxes was a seven page inventory sheet, packed his books and DVDs, his clothes and magazines, and neatly catalogued everything. To make sure he wouldn't stay long. But the litter box confused him. They both had allergies.

He re-ordered the boxes in a line from heaviest to lightest, and moved the first, second, and third boxes from the spare bedroom to just inside the front door. When he turned back from setting the third box precariously on top of its fellows, he found a small white goat peering at him from the kitchen doorway.

"Yah!" he said, startled, then more moderately, "Uh, Kristin? Goat. Goat!"

"Don't let her out," came Kristin's voice from the kitchen. "She's not an outdoor goat."

"Meh-eh-eh," said the goat and trotted toward him. It was truly tiny, one hot mess of fine, short curly white coat. It was the smallest goat Paul had ever seen. Its neat little white beard gave it an air of sagacity quite at odds with its frisky body language. It had piercing blue eyes.

Kristin appeared in the doorway behind it, wiping the sweat from her temples and neck with the bandanna. Paul wanted to leap over the goat and scoop her up, carry her away to sweat, rub her back, cry her a river, kiss her into tomorrow, steal the bandanna and keep it on his pillow.

He'd had this meeting planned all week. Knew exactly how he'd pitch his beg for forgiveness. Do anything for another chance, not cling so hard, set her free, allow her complete independence, just as long as she'd let him back into her life. He'd run the speech twenty times, and he knew how to serve it with the compelling gumbo of pathos, sincerity, and self-deprecating wit that had convinced her to move in with him in the first place. But the goat was truly freaking him out.

"Kristin," he said. "Let's try again. It doesn't have to end like this. We were so good together." Lameness muted him. None of that had been in the script, and Kristin just gaped at him like he was the Unibomber.

"Meh-eh," said the goat, and a moment later he heard an echo as a second miniscule goat sauntered out of their—Kristin's—bedroom and stared at him as intently as the first.

"Goat," said Paul. "Wait. I didn't—"

"Stop," said Kristin, both hands held up in front of her, bandanna still clasped in one of them. "Paul, I know you're still clinging to the wreckage, nursing some hope, but really: no. We've talked, and there's no more to say. You're a fading memory. I'm done. Moved on. It's time to go on with our lives. And I'll need the key back from you."

"But it's my key," he said, stupidly.

"It's my apartment. You didn't want to live here any longer. We changed the lease."

That was true. Living here without her would have eviscerated him slowly. He fumbled for something to say. "So, then ... You have goats now."

"Yes. I do."

"Is that legal? Are they spayed? Neutered?" Did you spay a goat?

"Paul, that's none of your concern."

"No," he said. "Of course not."

The nearest goat was so small and skinny that when it twitched its head it looked almost like a lizard. It was clearly intrigued by him, unlike the second goat which was engaged in a cheerful contest with the tassels on Kristin's beanbag chair.

"What are their names?"

She sighed. "Paul, I've put most of you out of my mind, but I do recollect what stalling sounds like."

"Right you are," he said.

The first box took up more space in his Honda than he'd expected. He spent a while moving the toolbox, jack, and beer around in the trunk to set up the most amenable configuration for the other boxes. He might have to unpack the clothes box and stuff its contents in around the rest. The last thing he wanted to do was make another trip. Kristin would scornfully identify that as a craven subterfuge, even if it wasn't.

Her front door was closed again. A little bloody mindedly, he used his key to open it. Kristin was sitting in the beanbag chair, unusually upright, staring at him wide-eyed. A tiny goat rubbed its head on her knee.

"I didn't mean to startle you," said Paul.

"You didn't. Not really. It's just odd, to see a man let himself in through my door."

A man. "I'm not just anyone." Too defensive. Bzzt. Shouldn't have said that. Should have had a witty comeback. He turned to pick up the second box and found a white goat posing atop it as if auditioning for *The Sound of Music*.

"Goat," he said. "Oh, sorry. Marks deducted for repetition."

"Meh-eh-eh." The goat sprang to the floor with some agility, danced away three steps, turned to face him. Can't catch me.

Paul took the second box to the car. This time Kristin was holding the door open on his return, bandanna thrust casually into her jeans pocket. He looked yearningly into her eyes, breathed in her warm aura, kept his hands firmly by his sides. Third box, to the car. This one went in the back seat. He could probably fit the smallest one from the spare room into the trunk with the other two, and stack the remaining three in the rear seat. Failing that, he could always put the last box in the front seat and lock it in place with the belt. Perhaps this would work after all.

Kristin's door was closed again. He stared at the doorbell for ninety seconds and then took out his key again.

She wasn't in the living room. The goats bleated at him, and skipped flirtatiously.

He knelt to take a closer look. The nearest was the slightly less skinny one that had peeked out of the bedroom. Its fur was so fine that patting it was like touching air. It did not smell bad. Its intelligent blue eyes pulled out his innermost thoughts and munched on them meditatively. He scratched it behind the ears, and just out of his reach, the truly skinny goat bleated in jealousy.

"Paul."

He straightened guiltily. "None of my concern. I know. I was just curious. It came up to me."

"It's a she. Both of them are."

"All right."

"Parsley and Sage."

"Pardon?"

Kristin stuck out her finger. The skinny goat studied it narrowly. "Parsley." She pointed to the one at his feet. "Sage." Hence the sagacity. He touched the peak of an imaginary cap and nodded solemnly to the goats. "Pleasure's mine."

Kristin and Sage eyed each other, then the human female came back over to sit cross-legged in the beanbag chair and the animal trotted up for strokes. Paul did not dare to breathe in case he frightened either of them away. Timid Parsley now nuzzled his ankle and he squatted on his heels to pet her. He was painfully aware of Kristin's proximity, of her smell, of how far apart her knees were, of her mussed hair. But the goat hair under his fingers soothed him and took away the sting.

"They're a new breed," said Kristin. "Miniature, house-broken, smarter than your average goat. Trained not to eat your clothes, house plants, garbage, or shoes. Unless you want them to, of course."

Kristin had never been a pet person. Now she'd replaced him with a brace of she-goats. It should have been another crater in Paul's multiply blasted heart, but he was already over it.

"They're a little magical," she added.

"Yes, they are." He was impressed by their affection and domesticity. Cat-smart and dog loyal, in an angora package.

"No, I mean, really. They're on loan from my aunt. To keep me company for a couple of weeks. She says nothing fixes you up quite like a four-legged friend."

That would be the Pennsylvania aunt with the hexes on the barn, who never used the telephone. Her home-made bread was to die for. Paul and Kristin would have stayed with her more often if it

wasn't for their cat allergies. "Oh," he said. The aunt lived alone in an old farmhouse, but Paul didn't recall any cows or sheep or other real farm animals nearby.

"She liked you," said Kristin, mistaking the tone of his Oh. "She was just a little cautious around you. She didn't know what a systems analyst was, so I could never convince her you weren't some kind of shrink."

"Goats," he said, still getting used to the word.

"She says they're my spirit animal."

Batty old witch. He grinned, feeling the atmosphere loosen up. "I suppose they are. Birth year, 1967. The Year of the Goat. You have a sparkling personality and inspire loyalty in all who know you. Creative and capricious. Marry a Rat or a Rabbit late in life. Avoid the Boar. Or something like that."

"I went to see her," said Kristin thoughtfully. "After you left. I cried and cried. That, I do remember."

Reality blinked. "You cried?" he said.

She looked at him uncertainly.

He'd been making a fuss of Parsley for more than a minute, and he still didn't feel any tickling in his nose. Possibly the only quadruped he wasn't allergic to.

Kristin had cried? His imagination swerved to avoid the concept. "Do they shed?"

"Minimally. I brush them daily."

"They seem hungry. What do they eat?"

"They're goats, Paul. They eat just about anything I have too much of." She and Sage touched noses. "Silly kitty. Why did we split up?"

"Eh? You and I, or you two?"

She looked at the goat and the goat looked at her, as if to say "Men!" Then Kristin looked at Paul. "You, Einstein. We split up because—"

He reached out a shaky hand. Parsley was still there at his fingertips to calm him. "Are you kidding?"

"Was that a pun?" she said.

"What?"

"I was reading my journal last night." Always a journal, never a diary. "It seems we went to the FolkFest, you and I. When it got dark you wanted to leave. I wanted to stay. I was furious, and we argued. And, for me, that was when it all began to end, that was when I started falling out of love with you. Apparently."

His heart ached, his mind reeled. "Wow."

"Paul?"

He searched for solidity but found only a goat. "So long ago? That was last June. But, Kristin, I'm the one who likes folk music. I'm the one who knows all the groups. You only came along with me in the first place to keep the peace."

"Exactly, Paul. That was the whole point."

It was no use. He couldn't make head or tail of it. "Why are we talking about last June?"

Kristin picked up Sage, pointing the goat at him like a weapon. Sage blinked gormlessly, spoiling the effect. "Because that was the turning point. It seemed important in the journal. And I want to understand why I would get so angry over something like that."

With some difficulty Paul regrouped, realizing this nutty conversation might actually work in his favor, in terms of his original mission here today. He could now easily launch into his plea for forgiveness. But somehow the more he played with Parsley, the more his mood shifted from that intent. She'd already made it crystal clear that she wouldn't take him back, so why make a spectacle of himself?

He shrugged. "Well, guess what, Kristin: it never made an ounce of sense to me either."

He'd handed her a cue to wrap up the conversation, yet she said, "You still haven't told me why we split up."

"Kristin—"

"In your own words."

Now he felt trapped. "Why, are you wearing a wire? Should I confess to dire deeds for the FBI guys in the black van?"

"You're funny," said Kristin in the same tone of voice that she might have said "A new Starbucks opened by my office."

Parsley pushed her head into his hand, he'd momentarily stopped scratching her neck. As Paul stroked her he searched his memory for the right words. If this was to be the very last eulogy of their relationship, if Kristin was having trouble sorting it all out, he wanted to be honest with her. He owed her that.

And, after all, it was rather simple. "OK. As I understand it, I was cramping you. Making you something you weren't. I wouldn't let go. Wouldn't set you free. You just wanted to be alone again."

"Hmmm," she said. "Well, freedom is important."

Paul hesitated. "Is that what it says in your diary?"

"That's none of your business."

"Of course." He stood up, incurring the protests of a silky white goat. "OK. Box number four."

"It says…."

He froze.

She sighed, shook her head. "What it says is: 'I just want to drive my own bus. Like Sandra Bullock, only more slowly and without the bomb. And without Keanu Reeves screaming at me.'"

"Meh-eh-eh-eh," said Sage.

"I'm not kidding," said Kristin with a perplexed frown. "It's like, 'All I ever wanted was to slow down and choose my own turns.'"

"I never—" Both goats stared at him. He stared back. "Your diary says I'm Keanu Reeves?"

"It's a journal!" she shouted in exasperation. "Once and for all time, Paul, the thing is a frigging *journal!* All right?"

The dust motes hung unmoving in the light from the window for a single leisurely moment, and then Paul cracked up. His howls of laughter sent the goats scurrying for the safety of the bedroom. Kristin glowered belligerently at him and then her lips started to twitch. She held the laugh off for another two breaths, and then gave in to it. She had a joyous laugh.

"You're a trip," he said, eventually. "Well. I need to get out of here."

"What?"

"I'm glad we're parting friends. Thanks for not making this too heavy. I do appreciate it."

"You're welcome," she said, nibbling on her lower lip.

Paul walked into the spare room, looked at the litter box, and walked out again. "Wait. That little speech: 'Clinging to the wreckage, nursing some hope, time to move on.' That was from your, uh, journal too, wasn't it?"

"That's none—"

"You barely remember me at all, do you? What the heck did you do, Kristin? Drop acid? See a hypnotist?"

She squinted up at him. "You know, Keanu, you're really not what I was expecting."

Continued on page 94

"YOU know, KEANU, you're really NOT what I was expecting."

Does he take BLOOD?

Time takes its toll on all of us, even if—in our youth—

By Karen Traviss Illustration By Toran Kotter

The lounge was too warm and too bright. It smelled of human pee, disinfectant, and beeswax polish, and the plush-covered armchairs set round the edges of the room all had white, crackling coverings on the seats. Ba'al Teekan Makak could hear each rustle of the plastic as the elderly occupants shifted position.

He couldn't hear so well these days, but his ears were still sharper than a human's.

"There's nothing for your father to worry about," said the social worker, talking past the demon's leathery black shoulder and folded wings as she wheeled his chair across the lounge. He gripped the armrests with his claws, fearful of being tipped out. "I know we had a little problem adjusting to the needs of the ... the differently sentient, but we've done lots of work with client focus groups and we're confident we can provide care that's much more sensitive to your father's cultural needs. We've even got a scratching post for his claws."

His offspring were behind him, following the chair as it plowed the thick, sage green carpet. He could see them with his wrap-around vision, his night hunter's eyes. Both youngsters looked uncomfortable.

"We can visit our sire any time?" asked his daughter.

"Course you can, dear," said the social worker. "But if you come at night, give us a call first, won't you? It might disturb the other residents." She paused, all care and cultural sensitivity, overwhelming his nostrils with a floral scent. "Now, about his special diet. Does he take blood?"

There were others here, not human and not exactly like him, but from the other world all the same. He could smell them. But it didn't matter anymore. When the worlds met, his kind had become subject to many human rules, as humans had changed to coexist with his. He was in a wheelchair. He was old, an old demon who was too weak to hunt anymore, and now that his world had meshed with the human realm of rules and decency, he wasn't even allowed to die the quick death his offspring would have granted him in his frailty.

Gummy, pale gazes watched him being wheeled into position by the bay windows. He glared back, not because he resented the rest of the home's residents, but because it was all he could do with blood-red pits for eyes.

"This is Mr Ba'al," said the social worker. "He's going to be staying with us now. We do music and movement on Tuesdays, Mr Ba'al. Would you like to join in?"

There was a time, in his youth, when he could have charred the woman's neat red curls with a single sulphurous breath. But this was no longer the time. He looked into her bright, sincere face, with plump cheeks he could have chewed right off.

"That would be nice," he surrendered.

"What's your name?" said the woman to his left. She had a crocheted, powder blue bed jacket, brown tartan slippers, a scalp you could see through her wispy white hair. Not worth eating, even if his teeth had been up to scratch.

"Ba al Teekan Makak," he said.

"Wassat mean?"

"Lord of the Cockroaches," he said. He could see incomprehension in her nondescript, watery blue, pale-ringed eyes. "Flies was already taken."

Bed Jacket said nothing and bent her head again. A dignified

We thought we were immortal.

gray-bearded man in a saffron turban leaned across conspiratorially

"They never get it right. They call me Mr. Singh. They don't realize singh is a title, not a name. Like Ba'al. I'm really Anjit Singh."

"Ba'al will do fine," said the demon.

"Suit yourself," said Anjit Singh.

The afternoon was long and Teekan Makak, Lord of the Cockroaches, stared out of the bay window onto the lawn with its edging of apricot pansies. There were trees that he could have swooped through, had his back not been playing him up so much these days. Where had the last few centuries gone?

Supper was early. The staff liked to get the cleaning up out of the way so they could watch TV in the lounge, said Anjit Singh. Teekan sat expectantly at the table, claws clasped in his lap, waiting for a full plate to appear on the placemat in front of him. The mat was a laminated painting of two enchanting tabby kittens, no doubt designed to stimulate a healthy appetite.

He waited for some time. Those around him were served with pork chops, cabbage—ah, the other awful smell!—and mashed potatoes, and began tackling their meals with misshapen cutlery designed specially for gnarled, arthritic hands. Just as he was beginning to think the staff had forgotten him, a care worker in a rustling gingham overall leaned close to his ear.

"Would you like to eat in your room, Mr. Ba'al?"

Can't I stay here?" He was fascinated by the slow motion chewing of his fellow inmates and the precise dissection of their pork. He wanted to watch.

"I think it might upset the other residents, Mr. Ba'al. Come on. Just until they get accustomed to you."

He nodded reluctantly and let her wheel him out to the hall where a chair lift waited at the foot of the stairs. As he passed, he saw another demon, a small, forlorn gray thing, tucking in half-heartedly to a pile of mash. It met his eye and parted its lips to reveal a toothless mouth, and shrugged. How the fearsome were reduced in station, Teekan thought, and sat obediently in the lift's seat as it rattled up the stairs to the first floor.

There was a little table in his bedroom, and a washbasin and toilet in the alcove. He had a nice view over the sports center at the back of the home. He perched on the table and ate his bowl of fresh blood and day-old chicks, watching an evening cricket match on the sports field.

It was already boring to have nothing to do and no feckless to consume, but he would see how things went. He hadn't planned on retiring at all, just a final stretch of his wings and a quick, clean end dealt by his nearest and dearest, as was proper. We have to follow human ways now and let you retire gracefully, his offspring had told him, as if they thought it would hinder their passage into polite society if they nipped his throat out in a civilized manner. Social climbers, he thought angrily, and licked the last blood out of the bowl.

He was now bored. Very bored.

He could have called a care worker and asked her to take him back down to the lounge to watch the TV, just to see what humans found so magnetic about it, but he couldn't face their curiosity or their indifference. He slid under the bed, because humans never, ever wanted to look for him under there, and rocked himself to sleep.

Humans certainly tried to make Teekan welcome during that first month at Cherry Trees. How did he like the food? Was his room warm enough? Did he have enough to read, enough to occupy him? They never stopped consulting and monitoring quality and pressing their concern on him. And it wasn't as if he was a special case, because they cared in identical measure for all the old humans and demons in the home. He saw it.

"I was a research chemist," said Anjit.

Teekan turned a wooden puzzle in his claws, debating when to simply give up and chew it apart. "I claimed the feckless and the unwise," he said.

They both turned to stare out of the window again. "You must have been busy, then."

"It's not as if there's no call for it these days, but it's a young demon's job. Very physical."

I had a department of 50 of the finest scientists of their generation. Now a slip of a girl changes my underwear for me."

"It's a bugger, growing old."

It's a bugger indeed."

The world of humanity began to blossom for Teekan. True, the old ladies and even some of the old men objected to eating with him, but if he took his blood and chicks in his room and joined them later for decaffeinated coffee in front of the TV, things settled down.

Anjit taught him to play chess, because a demon could do with some patience, he said. Teekan was not one for patience and had given up on the puzzle ball, gnawing it into its component pieces.

"I can still chew some things," he said, and Anjit laughed. "I am not spent yet."

At art and craft class, the care workers put Teekan with the toothless gray demon, Esaniel, and gave them clay to sculpt. They said it was good for them to be creative and keep their digits supple. Esaniel looked suspiciously at Teekan, and Teekan at him; why had the humans done this? Didn't they know the culler of the feckless and this demon—a guardian of wild places—had nothing in common? Esaniel broke the awkward silence first.

"Miss," he called, and his voice was a sigh, a gentle hiss. "Miss, can I sit with Mrs. Jenkins?"

The care worker scurried up to him and bent over with her hands braced on her knees to bring her face to his. He was a very small demon. "I thought you two might like to get to know each other, having so much in common," she smiled. "Don't you like Mr. Ba'al?"

"I don't dislike him, but—"

"What have we got in common?" Teekan asked, bewildered. Couldn't she see? Didn't she know?

"You're both from the demonic community," said Miss carefully. "But we're different."

"Of course you are, dear," she said, and helped Esaniel across to Mrs. Jenkins' craft table, holding his hand as if he were a peculiar small boy. Teekan, puzzled, patted his clay into a mound and carved it into the form of a beetle with his fore-claw. Anjit Singh slid into the empty seat opposite him, but not before taking his handkerchief from his pocket and wiping the plastic cover.

"We're all the same to them," Anjit said. "They never think they'll end up like us."

"Well, she'll never end up like me," Teekan said.

"Once you're old, that's all you are—old."

"Anyone can see a demon of the wild places has different needs and wishes than the Lord of the Cockroaches. I'm urban. I like houses."

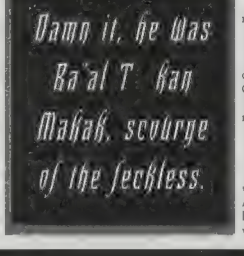
"We like the happy laughter of children, old songs round a piano, and talking about the war. Don't we?"

"No."

"No, definitely not."

"Then let us assert our individuality."

It was good to have Anjit around. The offspring visited less and less frequently, until by the end of August they frequently skipped a week. Well, they had a life to live, and although it saddened Teekan, it was the way of the monstrous now just as it was the



way of humans. Anjit ate with him, not minding the nature of Teekan's meals, and sat in the seat next to him when Cherry Trees Nursing Home took the residents on coach trips to places of interest

And they asserted their independence together

He and Teekan asserted their right not to take part in the old-time and ballroom dancing evenings laid on by well-meaning volunteers, because they had never liked dancing in their youth either

"It's their way of dealing with the inevitable," Anjit said. "They're want to know someone will do the same for them one day."

"What, bore them senseless?" Teekan gazed out the window at the cherry trees, blossoms long gone, fruit fallen, but leaves still intact. He wanted to prowl outside windows and crash through branches, frightening the feckless and unwise, just once more. He turned to face Anjit, fixing him with his fiery stare, which had once burned much more brightly.

"I'm going to go out tonight," he said.

"They lock the doors at 10 to stop us wandering around like Mrs. Bishop. They had to call the police to find her."

"Go on. I just want to feel the air under my wings again." He tried to spread them, but the black leathery skin was dry and fragile and his joints cracked with the effort. "It'll upset the matron. I could have eaten her whole, once, you know."

"OK." Anjit said. "They can't throw us out for it, can they?"

The residents were in bed by 10:30, seen safe in their rooms by care assistants and ticked off on a list to say they were all right. It was the sort of routine you had to have when people were of an age when they were prone never to wake up again. Teekan stuck his head out from under his bed to show the assistant he was really there.

"You sure you wouldn't be more comfortable on the bed, Mr Ba'al?" she said.

"I'm sure," he said. "Goodnight."

He waited for the footsteps to fade down the corridor and slid out onto the mat. It took a while to get up on his feet; by the time he had straightened out his limbs and wings, Anjit had eased the door open and tiptoed over to the window. It took both of them to get the sash open.

"Are you sure you can still do this?" Anjit whispered.

"Of course I can." Teekan made enough of a gap so that he could crouch on the window sill and lean far enough forward to free his wings. He flexed them. They felt better now. He could smell the scented warmth of a late summer evening, air laden with the fragrance of mown grass and earth and living things.

He launched himself. The downstroke of his wings lifted him off the sill and across the yard where they stored the waste bins and empty bottles, over the pine fencing and high above the sports ground. He could see the string of peach-colored sodium lights along the motorway; he rose higher still, over the roof of the sprawling house that had been so tastefully converted into a dignified final home for older people.

Damn it, he was Ba'al Teekan Makak, scourge of the feckless. He swooped toward Mrs. Jenkins' window, conveniently marked by the top growth of a climbing rose. His wing tips scraped the window panes and he circled to sit in the top of one of the cherry trees and watch.

After a few moments the light snapped on in Mrs. Jenkins' room, creating a dusty pink square in the blackness above the twin columns of the entrance. In the still night air the commotion was audible. He waited, out of breath but exhilarated, and gulped in great lungfuls of fresh, living, exciting air. He remembered the wild joy of flight and how easy it had once been. Oh, it was a great life, being a demon.

He stretched his wings and let out a long howl of triumph. The window opened and Mrs. Jenkins peered out. She stared at him, clearly disappointed.

"You bloody fool," she shouted. "I thought it was a cat." She slammed the window shut again and Teekan was left wondering how a cry that had once made humans foul themselves could be dismissed as caterwauling.

He thought about the unaccustomed churning in his belly, not a happy, hungry, hunting feeling but a bad emptiness. Lifting his wings, he prepared for another circuit of the home. But the wind didn't lift him, and he suddenly found himself falling, tangled in the branches, tearing his wing membranes. It hurt more than he ever remembered. He hung there for a few seconds, struggling, and the bad feeling in his stomach grew.

"Mr Ba'al, you get down here right away!" It was the night duty supervisor, standing in the doorway below, framed by the bright light from the hall. "Now!"

It was easier said than done. He knew what that churning in his stomach was, now--not hunger, but humiliation.

Abandoning dignity, he fell.

"Mr. Singh, you're his friend. You can make him see sense." Teekan listened to the conversation going on above him but not addressed to him. The matron clearly blamed Anjit for encouraging his night flights. "His flying days are over. If we don't keep him from hurting himself, we could get sued. You know we've had to report this to the Health and Safety Executive, don't you? Mr Ba'al's caused a lot of trouble."

"I know I have," Teekan cut in. "I am not deaf, although I don't hear as well as I once did, when I could hear your heartbeat from the next town and hunt you down by it. I am not stupid, although I did a stupid thing. Go care for someone else who wants it."

The matron huffed and stormed off. Anjit tucked the blanket round Teekan's legs and put his bowl of water where he could reach it from his chair.

"You can get pneumonia and die when you break bones at our age," Anjit said.

"You can sit in a chair and think you're dead already, too," Teekan said.

They lapsed into silence. Teekan had become depressed. For a while, he had thought he could adjust to a slow decline, as humans did, but he relived over and over again that moment when he went from soaring flight to a tangled heap on the ground, helpless like quarry. It was no way for a demon to meet the Other One.

"I think I'd like to sit in my room," he said. "Alone."

One of the assistants wheeled him into the service lift, settled him in his room and gave him a couple of ibuprofen tablets. She positioned him by the window. He gazed out listlessly and noticed a row of garlic cloves placed carefully along the sill, end to end.

"What's that there for?" he asked.

The assistant fussed with the blanket and put a magazine on his lap. "To stop you going for a spin, of course. You can't cross over garlic, can you?"

Teekan stared up at her in bewilderment, and then hissed in disgust, the hiss of a steam locomotive. "That's vampires, you foolish girl. I'm not a vampire. I'm Ba'al Teekan Makak. We are not all the same, do you hear me?" He reached out for a chunk of garlic and crunched it defiantly in front of her. "And no silver bullets or holy water, either. No, I do not take blood, which I could have told you had you asked me."

He waited for her to scuttle from the room and shut the door before he howled and howled and then wept sulphur tears that spluttered and hissed on his cheeks.

The leaves on the cherry trees had browned and fluttered to the ground, and a young lad in a denim jacket raked them into neat piles. Teekan watched for a while. He was not hungry, and he was not interested. He wanted to fly again.

Just once more. That was all.

"I will not help you do this," Anjit said. He sounded more frightened and upset than angry. Teekan knew the frightened sounds humans

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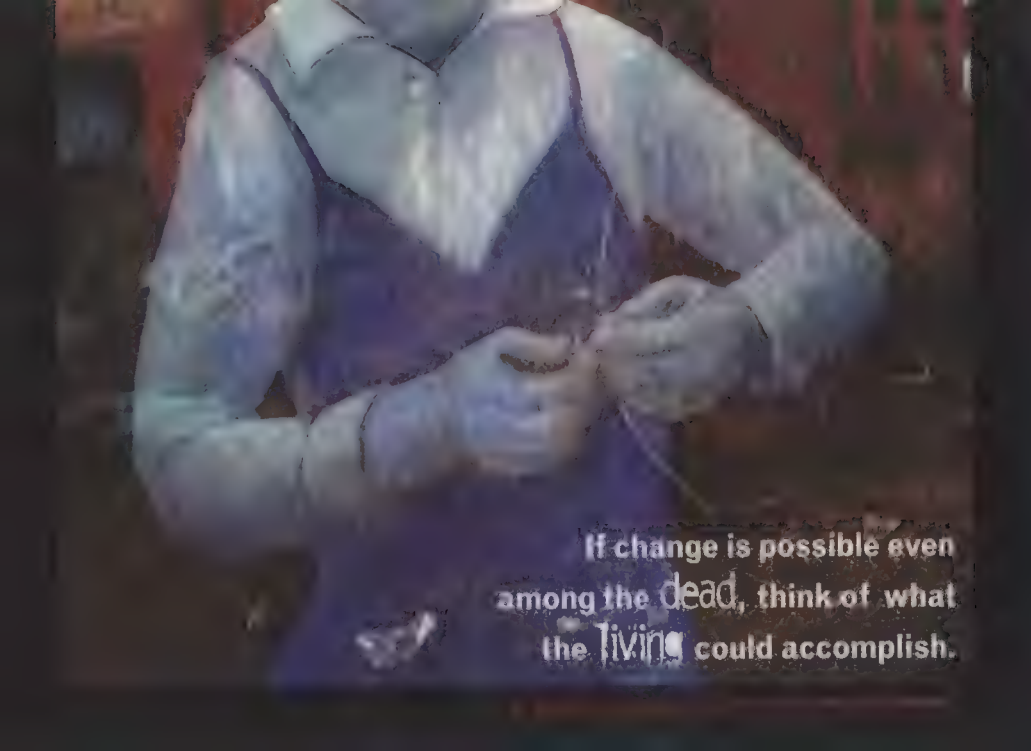
The Ghost Girls of Rumney Mill


If change is possible even
among the dead, think of what
the living could accomplish.

Dead girls in Rumney hang out at the old mill behind the oil farms that line the creek. Dead boys haunt the abandoned paint factory down where the water widens and circles the airport. Come down to the mill or the factory and you might feel the squeeze of our fingers on your hand or hear the wind sigh as we argue over who cheated at hopscotch or rock-paper-scissors or hide-and-seek. Come when the tide is high or the moon is full, and maybe you'll even see faint shadows in the shapes of our profiles

To the living, the mill is a decrepit old dump with blood-colored paint flaking off the sides. To us it's a dreamy maze of secrets. Sunlight and moonlight stream through windows that are sometimes broken and sometimes intact. The grindstone never moves, except on the nights when the mill itself travels back in time and workers with long beards appear out of nowhere. They barrel up spices, load up their wagons, and drive off into dark mists. Sometimes the city of Rumney disappears entirely, leaving behind skittering crabs, red-tailed hawks, and the occasional rustle of Pawtucket Indians in the grass. And us, of course

My name is Pauline I was thirteen when my asthma got so bad that I stopped breathing right in the middle of history class. Sheila's fourteen and she likes to pester the night watchman over at the oil farm by moving his keys or rustling his newspaper. Eight year-old Lisa accompanies her sometimes, always carrying the doll her parents gave her when she got sick with diabetes. The twins, Wendy and Peggy, died a year apart back when measles used to kill a lot of children. (Peggy will often scratch at her face and neck until we make her stop.) Younger than the twins is the Silent Girl, who wears a hair cap, keeps to the shadows, and never speaks

One summer night I was trying to pretend I was back in my old bedroom, which had posters of Australia on the walls and a blue quilt on the bed. With the door open I could see across the hall to my parents' room. If ghosts pretend hard enough it's like falling asleep and having a nice dream, and I had just about drifted off when the sound of Rachel singing "You Light Up My Life" broke my concentration. Rachel is sixteen and sang soprano in the Winnisemmit High School choir back when everyone liked music by the Carpenters and Olivia Newton-John.

I went to her and said, "You're singing too loud."

Rachel stopped. "I am not. Go back upstairs."

"Make me," I said. She can't because I'm the strongest girl in the mill. I can move heavy objects and pull hair and do mean things if I want. Nobody remembers more than I do about being alive, and when the wind howls the youngest girls turn to me for comfort.

Rachel scowled. "Everyone likes my singing but you."

Lisa jumped down from her perch on the grindstone. "Listen! Someone's coming."

We went outside. Sometimes homeless people cross over the bridge in search of a place to sleep. If a man tries to stay with us we tickle his feet until he goes away, but women are welcome as long as they don't make a mess or try to light fires. Tonight's visitor was Rita, an old lady with no teeth and coat pockets bulging with plastic bags. We watched in the dying light of day as she picked her way along the weeds.

"Rita, Rita, do you have any chocolate?" Lisa asked. Chocolate is what Lisa misses most from the world of the living. "Just a little?"

Rita shuffled toward the water to go pee, and we saw that her urine was dark and her inner thighs were covered with weeping sores. She muttered something crazy and pulled her pants back up. Seeing Rita always reminds me that it's better to be a ghost who makes sense then a living person who doesn't, but I'd still rather be alive. Oblivious to us, Rita came up to the mill and settled into a musty corner on the first floor. She displaced our resident litter of ghost kittens as she did, but they only meowed and scampered off into the shadows.

Back upstairs I tried again to imagine myself home, in bed, a yellow nightlight on the wall and my terrier Roscoe curled up beside me. Just as I thought I could smell Roscoe's stinky breath, Sheila breezed in with a smile on her face.

"There's a new boy at the factory who wants to come live with us," she said. "What do you think?"

Sheila likes boys, but I don't. They were rough and mean when alive and they're rough and mean now that they're dead. Their leader is Mike, who used to be Rachel's boyfriend until he accidentally killed them both by smashing his car into a concrete barrier. Sammy got hit by a bus the same day the first astronauts landed on the moon. Richard died when someone shot at his brother, little David died of AIDS, and Sean hanged himself in his dad's basement. (An accident, supposedly, but I don't know how someone accidentally hangs himself.) Sheila hopes to lose her virginity to Sean or Mike, but that's not easy to do when you don't really have a body.

Annoyed at the interruption, I said, "Only girls can stay here."

"He's a special case. Come look."

She pulled me to the window. In the wild grass below stood a thin boy just a little younger than me. He had wispy blond hair and might have been wearing a blue dress. (It's not always easy to tell what ghosts are wearing because most of the time we see each other only as blurry, watercolored outlines.) The boy looked unbearably sad, as if he'd had a dog like Roscoe and someone had just killed it.

Sheila said, "His name is Matthew, but he wants to be Michelle. The boys make fun of him because he thinks he's a girl."

"Of course they do. They would've beat him up at school." This Matthew person needed to learn that the dead aren't any more tolerant than the living. "He's as crazy as Rita."

"No, he's just like Boy George. I think it's kind of fun. Someone new to play with."

"Tell him to go away, Sheila."

Matthew went away but came back one day while the twins and I were tracing shapes in the dust on windows. We sketched letters of the alphabet and then Wendy drew a tree and Peggy drew a flower. Wendy said Peggy's flower looked stupid and Peggy said Wendy's tree looked more stupid, and so we gave up on the artwork and went outside to see Matthew and Lisa hosting a tea party for their dolls.

"More milk?" Lisa asked.

"Yes, please," Matthew said.

Wendy put her hands on her hips. "Why are you dressed like a girl?"

Matthew pretended to pour the milk for the doll he had fashioned out of newspaper, twigs, and a beer can. The way his hair appeared to ruffle in the breeze annoyed me. My own hair was thick and curly and the hairdresser had cut it wrong the week before I died, so I was stuck being a ghost with a bad haircut.

God is a touchy subject. If He's real then Heaven probably is too, but if Heaven is real why aren't we in it? I don't remember ever going to church so maybe I'm damned.

Matthew said. "I was supposed to be a girl, but God got it wrong and I was born a boy."

"God doesn't make people wrong," I said

"He makes mistakes, like babies born with part of their skulls missing or without arms or legs." Matthew's eyes got all squinty. "I knew I was supposed to be a girl ever since I was born. My mom's doctor said I could have an operation when I grew up. They can do that. Turn men into women."

"They can't do it when you're dead."

"Don't be mean, Pauline," Lisa said.

Matthew gave me a cold look. "I'm used to people who don't understand."

"I bet you are," I said.

"I want to have tea," Wendy said, and sat down to play with them. I waited for Matthew to argue some more but he didn't, so Peggy and I went down the creek looking for treasure to add to our collection. So far we've found a WHS class ring, a broken watch, three mismatched earrings, several muddy coins, and dozens of pieces of glass worn smooth by the water. Yellow butterflies flitted overhead and police sirens wailed in the distance while we hunted around in the mud and reeds.

"Did God make Matthew wrong?" Peggy asked.

"No."

"But babies born without arms—"

"Everybody's born the way God wants. Sometimes we just don't understand why."

God is a touchy subject. If He's real then Heaven probably is too, but if Heaven's real why aren't we in it? I don't remember ever going to church so maybe I'm damned, but Lisa once told us about her first communion (she got twenty-five dollars from her grandmother) and Rachel made her bat mitzvah (that's a Jewish thing). Babies are born with birth defects because of problems with their DNA or something, but I didn't explain that to Peggy because I didn't want her asking more questions. Matthew had been born a boy and died a boy and would forever be a boy.

"Matthew's just playing a joke," I assured her.

That night the smell of nutmeg became very strong. When we looked out the windows we saw a fine layer of white blanketing everything. Two sweating horses pulled a black sled past and kept going with the faint jingle of bells. The little ones wanted to make angels, but no matter how hard we tried we could only make faint indentations in the snow. The water in the creek rushed black and icy and the sky was a deep velvety black. When the novelty of winter wore off we huddled inside the mill owner's old office.

"Pauline, is Matthew a girl or a boy?" Lisa asked from where she nestled against my side.

"He's just trying to trick us. Remember the time Richard gave you a box and told you it was full of chocolates?"

Lisa sighed. "It was just tar and rocks."

Peggy scratched her neck. "Sammy used to hide in the grass and scare us."

"And Mike hung that dead rat up outside the door just to be gross," Sheila said.

"It wasn't a rat, it was a vole," Rachel said.

Sheila shook her head. "It was a rat."

"A vole," I said. "Rats have long tails and voles don't. Anyway, don't you see? Whenever they're bored, the boys try to think up ways to annoy us. If we just ignore Matthew he'll give up and go do something else."

The next day I wandered too far down the creek in search of treasure and found myself in the boys' territory. The factory is a long, low brick building with boarded up windows and a parking lot full of trash. When it slips back into time, the boys get to watch machines mix and can paint. The sounds of cheering rose over the din of car traffic and when I crept closer I saw Mike beating up Matthew.

"You want to be a homo fag forever?" Mike asked. "Fight back!"

Curled up on the ground, Matthew wasn't moving. Being hit when you're dead doesn't hurt as much as it does when you're alive, but Mike had hit him a lot. The other boys stood around watching with various degrees of interest.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Stop that!"

They all ignored me. Before Mike could kick Matthew again, I picked up a rock and threw it as hard as I could. It struck the back of Mike's head, deflected as if bouncing off something soft, and then dropped down to the dirt. He whirled around angrily.

"What the hell—" he started. "What's wrong with you, Queen Bee?"

He knows I hate that nickname. I said, "Leave him alone and stop being a bully."

"Pauline!" Little David dashed toward my legs and wrapped himself around my knees. Although this wasn't the best time for hugs and kisses, I lifted him up. He smelled like talcum powder and slightly sour milk, but I liked the way his arms tightened around my neck.

"What are you going to do if I don't?" Mike asked with a cruel little smile. I don't know what Rachel ever saw in him. "Go back to your beehive, Queenie."

Tall, sad-faced Richard said, "Yeah, Pauline. We'll handle this."

"By fighting?" I shifted Little David's weight from one hip to the other and put scorn in my voice. "You can't think of anything better to do?"

Sean juggled a cigarette butt between his hands. "What's there to do that we haven't done a thousand times before?"

"You don't have to hurt him," I said. "Get up, Matthew."

He pulled himself up and wiped at his mouth as if there were blood there. Maybe it was just the memory of blood from other fights. He shot me an angry look, probably embarrassed because I'd seen him lose so badly, and backed away from Mike with a little limp.

"He's a homo sissy." Mike glared first at Matthew and then me. "I told him to go live with you girls and not come back."

I said, "You're just prejudiced and narrow minded. Violence doesn't help anything."

Mike flexed his fist. "Punching you would help. I'd feel good about that all day long."

Sean threw his cigarette butt to the ground and stepped on it as if he'd really been smoking. "This is stupid. Let's go throw rocks at ducks or something."

Most of the boys drifted off. Without an audience Mike lost all his bluster, so he just muttered a threat or two and went inside the factory. I took Little David down to the creek, which widened at that point to join the river. Tankers and freighters unloaded at a half dozen docks. Airplanes roared over our heads, some of them so low we could see the landing gear retract. We waved at the passengers, but of course they didn't see us.

Little David curled up in my lap. "When can I go home, Pauline?"

I didn't have an answer so I said nothing. Matthew stepped out of the bushes—I hadn't even heard him follow us—and said, "Don't worry, David. One day we'll all get to heaven, and it'll be just like home." To me he said, "I didn't need your help."

"You weren't doing so good on your own."

"What's the point?" Matthew shielded his eyes against the sun and watched another plane take off. "He'll just do it again someday."

"The point is you should fight back. You're a boy, too."

Matthew jerked as if I'd touched him with a live electrical wire. "I'm not a boy! Can't you see that's why he hates me? They all do."

He ran off to go sulk. I felt a little bad and waited for him to come to the mill again, but a week passed before he appeared in a dinghy that must have drifted away from one of the boat clubs near the airport. He didn't have any oars, but the incoming tide pushed him along and made the boat spin in circles.

"Anybody want a ride?" he asked. "It's a lot of fun!"

"We're having plenty of fun over here." I said. In truth we'd been playing Ultimate Hopscotch, which combines hopscotch, hide-and-seek, and Marco Polo. The rules of Ultimate Hopscotch change constantly and a referee is needed to keep track of all the infractions, but even the variations grow boring after a while.

"This is better," Matthew said.

"No it's not," I said.

Sheila sprinted down to the edge of the creek. "I want a ride."

Lisa came out from behind a pile of old broken concrete. "Me, too."

The twins gave me a beseeching look as Wendy asked, "Can we go, too, Pauline?"

Peggy tugged on my hand. "Pretty please?"

"I'm not going to stop you," I said crossly. "But you know what happens if you go too far."

Matthew waited until the water took him close to the bank, then stepped over the side and tried to pull the boat ashore. He wasn't quite strong enough, though, and the tide threatened to suck it away. Sheila grabbed the sides of the dinghy.

"Come on, Pauline," she said. "Help us."

"I can do it," Matthew said stubbornly.

I folded my arms. "It's his idea. Let him do it."

Matthew grabbed the bow, gritted his jaw and yanked with all his strength. The dinghy came up onto the ground. Like a true gentleman (a true gentleman in a blue dress) Matthew helped everyone climb aboard and asked, "Are you sure you don't want to come, Pauline?"

"I'm positive."

"We don't need her," Lisa said to the other girls.

"You do if you want a push off." I left them stranded there and went inside the mill to look for the Silent Girl. No one had seen her for a few days and we were worried she had strayed again. It might be weeks or months before she reappeared. Rachel, combing her hair by the window, was less concerned with the Silent Girl than she was with picking a fight.

"You're just jealous because they like Michelle more than they like you," she said.

One of the ghost kittens was curled up in a patch of sunlight, and I dangled a piece of string in front of it until one tiny eye opened.

"You're afraid because you can't intimidate her."

I dragged the string on the floor, letting the kitten pounce and catch it.

"And you don't like her because she's prettier than you are," Rachel said. Her smile vanished when I reached over and pulled her precious hair.

"Ouch!" she cried. "Why are you so mean all the time?"

"Because all of you are so stupid! She's a he and his name is Matthew, not Michelle. He's just some crazy kid who wants to be something he's not."

"Maybe we're all crazy! Didn't you ever think of that?" Rachel's voice cracked. "Maybe we're all stuck here because we want something we can never have."

With that she ran off and disappeared in the shadows. I could hear her sniffling as if I'd really hurt her. Stupid girl, but she's probably right. Lisa wants sweets, Sheila wants to be with a boy, and Peggy wants to stop itching. Wendy cries because she misses her mother. Sean craves cigarettes, and Little David wants to go home. We all want something and maybe that wanting keeps us here, but trust me—making yourself not want something is very hard to do, especially when you're just a kid.

The sound of laughter brought me to the window. Working together, Matthew and the girls had managed to get the boat back into the water. They floated away without a thought or care about me. Sick of them, sick of the mill, and completely sick of being dead, I made my way across the marsh to the overgrown lot where the old drive-in once stood. For a long time I sat amid rusty speaker poles, trying to imagine a movie on the tattered screen. No one bothered me until Matthew showed up.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"I'm just exploring." He looked at some broken pieces of concrete. "I've never been to a drive-in."

"It closed a long time ago."

"You know a lot of history and stuff, don't you?" he asked.

"More than everyone else."

Matthew gave me one of his squinty-eyed looks. "So you must have heard of Christine Jorgensen."

I folded my arms and bluffed. "What about her?"

"Never mind," he said, as if it weren't really important. He lifted his head and turned toward the lights of Rumney, which had started to twinkle in the dusk. Time is like that when you're dead—sometimes hours pass like minutes, or minutes pass like hours, or you think only a day's gone by but it's been a month.

"I want to live with all of you in the mill," he said.

"It's only for girls."

"You told Mike he was the one who was prejudiced, but you were really talking about yourself."

The accusation stung. "It's not prejudice when it's just common sense."

"Your common sense, not mine. I know what I am. I died for—"

Matthew stopped himself from finishing that sentence. No one had said anything about how he'd died. He threw his hands up in the air and started to walk toward town.

"You can't go there," I said. "It's too far. Don't you know that yet?"

He gave me a challenging look. "Scared? Go back and watch the kids."

We circled around the makeshift flower memorial that marked someone's fatal accident and crossed the highway into Rumney proper. The nearest neighborhood was full of crabapple trees poking through the sidewalks and small houses with broken cars in their yards. Although it was summertime, no one was out playing or walking dogs. We could see the lights of televisions through open windows and heard some mother yelling at her kids.

"You miss this, don't you?" Matthew asked.

I shrugged. "Maybe."

We passed the Rumney library, a marble building with tall windows, iron gates, and a golden dome. The millionaire Andrew Carnegie had donated the money to build it. When I was alive I would visit almost every day to see my grandmother, the head librarian. We kept going past the post office and the elementary school and up a hill to houses that overlooked the marsh. I felt myself getting tighter and tighter, an elastic band stretched too far, but I didn't say anything and neither did Matthew.

Finally he stopped and pointed. "That's home."

The brown house had a sagging porch and worn roof. Weeds had overrun the flowerbeds. The small, crowded kitchen overlooking the garden smelled like old garbage. Someone had covered the counters with newspapers, magazines, bills, tissue boxes, jumbo-size cereal boxes, junk food, and just plain junk.

"Ma?" Matthew called out. "You home?"

He went into the next room but I stayed to look at the pictures on the refrigerator. Matthew had been cute in kindergarten, but as he grew older he looked sadder and sadder. I didn't see any brothers or sisters or even a father, but some of the photos had been jaggedly cropped with scissors. The divorce must have been nasty. The newspaper clippings were about Matthew in school plays, Matthew in Little League, and Matthew's funeral mass at the Lady of Fatima church. No cause of death was given.

Adjacent to the kitchen was a small dining room and just beyond that a living room where the TV was playing for Matthew's mother. She sat half curled up in a faded blue recliner, looking small and old. Baby portraits and old black-and-white pictures hung in dusty frames all over the walls. None of the men looked like they could have been Matthew's father, although some might have been grandparents or great-grandparents.

Matthew bent down and kissed his mother's forehead. "Just came to say hi, Ma."

She didn't stir. Matthew stroked her cheek, his eyes bright, and I

thought maybe he had forgotten about me standing there. (The tightness had grown so bad I didn't think either of us would be able to stay much longer.) Just a few blocks from the library was my own house and family, our bright kitchen without any clutter in it, our living room decorated with Mom's oil paintings and Dad's high-school trophies. Visiting my parents would hurt too much and emphasize everything I've lost, but maybe for Matthew the pain of visiting hurt less than the pain of staying away

"You've got to take care of yourself, Ma," Matthew said

Stepping away to give him some privacy, I bumped against a desk piled high with more mail. The return addresses were from lawyers, bill collectors, and the state prison in Rowe. Four letters from the prison had not been opened. A different idea about Matthew's father emerged, but before it could fully form Matthew straightened and said, "I'll show you my stuff."

We should get back—" I tried to tell him, but he had already gone upstairs to a small room under the eaves. In the light from the hallway I saw posters of baseball players and banners from different teams. The lamp was shaped like a baseball bat. White baseballs had been sewn onto the blue bedspread. I saw nothing girlish or feminine at all, which meant he'd been tucking us all along.

"You lied—" I began, but Matthew shook his head.

"Watch," he said

The light shifted. The room, like the mill, rolled itself back through weeks and months. Matthew's father, a skinny man so tall he had to bend over or hit his head on the ceiling, appeared with a blue dress clutched in hand. Foam flecked his lips.

"I told you, no more goddamned dresses!"

On the bed, an image of Matthew scrambled to his feet. "But Dad—"

"You're not a girl!" Matthew's father punched him in the face so hard that his head whipped around and a crack came from his neck. "Boys are boys and girls are girls!"

More punches followed, blows of anger and denial and shame. The Matthew beside me did nothing as the vision of his death played out. For all our petty tricks, ghosts are mostly powerless. We can only watch and witness and grieve for what we've lost.

"Boys are boys and girls are girls," the ghostly Matthew said. "Isn't that what you think, too?"

I turned away from the terrible images to watch a different scene emerge from the past. On a rainy afternoon a young Matthew, maybe only six or seven, twirled beside his bed in a ballerina's costume. He was clumsy and awkward and obviously not a girl, but when he lifted his head he looked happier than I had ever seen him.

"Matthew—" I started, but at that very moment the elastic holding me to the marsh snapped. The force of it yanked me backward through a great gray tunnel that seemed to last forever. This was the little death, the penalty for straying too far from the marsh. Every thing I knew or thought faded away. When I could see and hear again, the mill's windows were full of autumn light and the twins were holding my hands. From somewhere far away Rachel was singing a beautiful and sad song.

"We're so glad you're back," Wendy said.

"You were gone for a very long time," Peggy said.

"What about Matthew?" I asked, but no one had seen him.

I want my life back. I want to travel to Africa, to the Amazon, and to Australia, and that's just the beginning. But there are no forseeable beginnings in my future, only middles.

The wild roses by the creek were dying on the day Rachel, Lisa, and I went down to the paint factory. Mike and Sean were kicking a half-crushed can back and forth in the broken parking lot. A living person might have thought it was just the wind. Soon the leaves would turn and the skies would darken, but at least winter days are short and spring always returns.

"The Queen Bee returns," Mike said when he saw me. "Too bad. It was so quiet while you were gone."

"Shut up," I said.

"We came to play with Matthew," Lisa said.

Mike kicked the can so hard it sailed past Sean's shoulder. "Who said the little sissy's back?"

"Don't be stubborn." Rachel spoke with a hint of affection that I would never understand. "Wendy saw him on the marsh yesterday."

Sean retrieved the can. "He's not here. Try the pier."

Behind the factory lay a winding path some local kids use as a shortcut to go drink or make out at a rotting old pier. We followed it to where the setting sun made the creek's oil patches gleam like gold. A lone tugboat was moving downstream, its pilot so close we could see him eating a sandwich and potato chips. Matthew was sitting with his legs dangling over the water. I hadn't told anyone about how he died. We each have our own stories to tell, and years and decades in which to tell them.

Lisa sat beside him. "What are you doing?"

Matthew didn't look up. "Just wondering what would happen if I jumped in."

"You wouldn't drown," I said.

"It's not fair that this isn't heaven," he said. Maybe he'd thought stretching himself too far was a way to escape the marsh, but I could have told him otherwise. We are trapped in the mud and tides as surely as the reeds and wildflowers.

"Pauline says you can come live with us if you want," Lisa said.

Matthew met my gaze but then turned his head.

"Not out of pity," he said.

"Not out of pity," I said. "It'll be good to have a new girl around. But you have to learn to play Ultimate Hopscotch, and help Lisa find her doll when she loses it, and listen to all of Rachel's sappy songs."

"They're not sappy," Rachel protested.

Lisa smiled. "Sometimes they're sappy."

"Dead," Matthew said, and became Michelle from that day forward.

The three of them started back. I lingered to watch the tugboat. The sun warmed my face and the breeze smelled like salt and diesel. A sudden impulse made me wave my arms and yell "Can you see me?" but the pilot of the tug only drank his coffee and kept on course for the harbor. If it's true that wanting is what keeps us chained to this world, I'll never be free. I want my life back. I want to sleep in my old bed, smell my mother's perfume, sit in a hard classroom chair, eat pizza and Chinese food, play fetch with Roscoe, and even get my period again. I want to grow up and have a boyfriend, a husband, and children. I want to travel to Africa, to the Amazon, and to Australia, and that's just the beginning. But there are no foreseeable beginnings in my future, only middles that turn and turn upon themselves like grindstones.

Still, a girl can dream. Even if she wasn't born a girl. And with that in mind I followed Michelle and the others back to mill. ❧

DOWN WITH THE LIZARDS AND THE BEES

BY TIM PRATT • ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT GOTO

How far would you go for love? To the Styx and beyond? Okay, but don't forget to remember what you're giving up.

"I brought you some weed," I said, reaching for the bag in my pocket

"Fuck that I want rock "

I sighed. "Weed was good enough last time "

"That was a long time ago It's a new season now Gimme rock "

He was punishing me Well, why not? And maybe he really did want rock. It couldn't hurt him now, but I still hated doing it. I'd given him enough drugs when he was alive "I'll be back."

You'd think crack houses would change locations, float around to avoid trouble, but I knew one that had been in the same place for years. I knocked on the door, and the man I wanted was home, and awake, having not gone to bed at all the night before He stood in the doorway of the bedroom, smiling at me. "White boy Superstar Been a long time "

We exchanged the ritual pleasantnes, and I handed over some money, and returned to H.'s lot with a vial of crack. I dropped the lumps of crystal cocaine through the grate They splashed

"Okay," H said "Tell me your dream "

I settled back comfortably on my heels. "I was on the back of a truck, a flat bed semi, sitting on some splintery timbers, facing backwards, looking at the road behind The truck went into a tunnel, total blackness, for a while, then it came out, and we were on a dirt road The truck slowed down I saw things running along both sides of the road, pacing us. "

"Us?"

"Yeah Somebody was driving the truck I banged on the window to get the driver's attention, to tell him about the things following us, but he didn't look back We slowed down some more, because the road was muddy. Then the things jumped on the truck They were monitor lizards "

"No shit?"

"Yeah I wouldn't even know what a monitor lizard was if it wasn't for you " I expected him to say "I wouldn't even be dead if it wasn't for you," but he didn't "The lizards jumped on me," I said. "And well they ate my face "

H whistled. "Maybe you were just missing me Lizards and guilt "

"No It was one of *those* dreams. For sure "

"Yeah Okay You're going on a journey, with a companion who will choose the path. The destination will matter to him more than *you* do. There will be terrors and trials The lizards hell, monitor lizards were my favorite .. they might just symbolize monsters, but maybe they mean you'll have to deal with guilt, or something from your past . maybe even me?"

He sounded so hopeful. I didn't have the heart to remind him that he was dead, and unlikely to have any bearing on my life anymore, beyond these hollow conversations

"I can't back out? I can't avoid it?" I asked

"No, bro. You're on the truck." His voice changed, became playful "Oh, there's one other thing the dream means "

"Yeah?

"Yeah. Classic symbolism. Straight outta Freud. It means you're gay " He laughed It was a terrible laugh, because it sounded almost exactly like he had when he was alive "Hate to break it to you."

"Mom and Dad will freak," I said. "Thanks, H." I got up to leave

"B ," he said, softly, serious

"Yeah?"

"I love you, B "

My throat closed up I shook my head "Damn it, H. We agreed we weren't going to say that anymore "

He didn t answer

I left, trying to shake off the emotional aftereffects of the conversation, wondering when this thing would happen, when someone else's destiny would hit me like a truck

I went to a coffee shop, got tea and a bagel. I can't stomach coffee anymore, not even really milky espresso It gives me the jitters

I sat, leafing through a newspaper Somebody said "Hey I looked up A skinny guy stood nearby, with a big nose and kinky hair, dressed all in black He was ugly in an arresting way, with big, light blue eyes He had nice hands, I noticed that right away; long fingers I've always liked nice hands

"You're him, the guy " He snapped his fingers "Bradley Bowman."

"Yeah." I looked down at my paper again, but it was too late This was the guy The one driving the truck in my dream

"I loved you in *The Glass Harp*," he said. Most people said that Then he surprised me. "And that spoken word thing you did, *Underwater Monologues*, that was great "

"Thanks," I said, and meant it. I'd been nominated for a Grammy for *Monologues*, but not many people had heard it It was the one decent thing I'd ever written myself

"I didn't know you lived around here."

"Pretty close " I hesitated, but H had said it—I was already on the truck "Want to sit down?"

"Yeah!" He put down his bag, pulled out a chair, and sat down I'm Jay "

"Good to meet you Call me Brad "

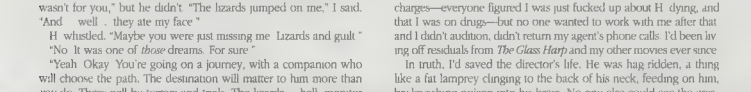
"So, uh " He fidgeted with a coffee spoon "You, uh, doing anything—'

"No," I said. "Pretty much out of the business, since that thing with that director "

He actually blushed "I heard about that, yeah "

My last acting job Jesus, six years ago. Fourth day on the set, I attacked the director, tried to strangle him, people said He didn't press charges—everyone figured I was just fucked up about H dying, and that I was on drugs—but no one wanted to work with me after that and I didn't audition, didn't return my agent's phone calls I'd been living off residuals from *The Glass Harp* and my other movies ever since

In truth, I'd saved the director's life. He was hag ridden, a thing like a fat lamprey clinging to the back of his neck, feeding on him, backwashing poison into his brain No one else could see the creature, but I could see all kinds of shit, after H died In exchange for a bottle of quaaludes poured down the sewer grate, H told me how to make a nasty broth to soak my hands in, and then I could touch the lamprey thing as well as see it. It worked. H is always right, now that he s dead



The dead know things, but the living have to do the work

I killed the lamprey, ripped it away from the director's neck and tore it apart, and people thought I was trying to kill the director, so I killed my career, too. It was a corpse I didn't mourn much

"If it's not too personal," Jay said. "I mean ..your partner died, right?"

I nodded. "A long time ago "

"I only mention it because my girlfriend died a couple of months ago " He looked at the table I couldn't read anything into his expression at all "She got stung by a bee, when we were having a picnic, and it turned out she was allergic " He shook his head "She died in the ambulance "

"Oh, Jay, I'm so sorry " What a shitty, out-of-nowhere thing No one was surprised when H died the way he did. He'd been doing more and more drugs, and I was buying them for him, I had all the connections, and he shot up too much and he died Simple, straightforward. But to die from a bee sting . that was bad shit

"But I think " Jay said, and then trailed off. He looked up. He looked into my eyes. "I think I can bring her back."

Any other day, I'd have figured he was crazy, excused myself, and taken off. And for *me* to think someone's crazy, with the things I've seen, that's serious. But I'd had one of *those* dreams, and Jay had driven me into the darkness, so I just said "How?"

And he told me.

We managed to hide in the BART station in Berkeley, which is no mean feat, crouching a little way down the tunnel (well away from the third rail) after the last train of the night passed by. We listened as the BART cops shooed out the stragglers, and heard the metal gates rattle down, blocking us from the world above. We waited for a while, in the dark and the silence, then helped one another back up to the platform. We sat against the wall, our eyes gradually adjusting to the dimness.

Jay ate potato chips, every crunch as loud as the trump of doom. He didn't seem nervous at all, like he did this kind of thing all the time.

"How'd you hear about this train?" I asked.

"Somebody at a party was talking about urban myths, new ghost stories, shit like that."

"Huh," I said. Thinking I'd never heard about a ghost BART train. Thinking the guy Jay heard at the party had probably made it all up on the spot. Thinking maybe that didn't matter, that the confluence of Jay's need, and my presence, and my dream would be enough to call something imagined into being.

"It's good of you to come with me," Jay said. "It would be harder to do, if I was alone. I might not have come down here at all. Maybe ...maybe your old boyfriend is down there, too."

I didn't answer. I'd thought of that, sure. But H. had been dead a lot longer than Jay's girlfriend. Did that matter? Could we bring Jay's girlfriend back, but not H., because she was fresher, or because she hadn't earned her death like H. had? I could visit H. any time I wanted, sure, right in the empty lot where he'd died, by the sewer grate he'd puked blood into. But that ghost was residual heat, a fading photograph, not H. himself. If H. had a soul, something essential and eternal, it was . . somewhere else. Maybe where we were going tonight. I didn't want to think about that.

"What's your girlfriend's name?" I asked.

here. Jay had never really believed the train would come. I guess he thought this was going to be a ritual, a vigil, a night spent in E.'s honor, with no consequences.

Maybe it would have been, if I hadn't joined him. It was more than that, now.

"Coming?" I asked. Not impatient. Just asking. This was his journey, though I never really thought he'd walk away.

He nodded, squared his shoulders, and walked into the dimness inside the train. I followed.

There were no seats, and instead of metal handrails on the ceiling, there were large bone hooks. I grabbed one. Jay did the same.

A voice, cold as dry ice, whispered "Doors are closing," over a speaker.

Aren't they always? I thought, and the doors hissed shut.

The train accelerated smoothly through the dark. Jay hung from the hook, his eyes closed, swaying. "I wonder how far we have to go."

"I think it's always a short trip to the underworld," I said, looking at the window and seeing only my reflection against the blackness outside.

"You'd think there'd be a cost," Jay said, opening his eyes. "You know? Two pennies each, like in the old stories."

"That buys you a one-way ticket. I guess there's a different price for a round trip."

"What kind of price?" Jay asked.

I shrugged. I figured we'd have to pay afterward.

We didn't travel for very long. The train stopped, and diffuse light shone in through the windows, faint like the glow of bioluminescent mushrooms. There were bare trees and swirling fog, and more than anything the place looked like the set of a B-grade horror movie. The doors hissed open.

We got off the train, Jay first. "Where to?" I said. The trees were petrified, black, or else they were stone carvings of trees.

"I guess we follow the buzzing," he said, his hands shoved deep in his pockets as he stared into the trees and the fog.

I heard them, then. Bees, off in the distance, sounding angry and busy, just like the clichés say.

"Is it dangerous here?" Jay asked.

It was, in many ways, a silly question, but I answered it seriously. "I think this place is normally beyond danger—this is where you

FACILITATOR, AND I WANTED TO KEEP IT THAT WAY.

. . .tunice. She hated that name. Her middle name was Ethel. She hated that worse. I called her E."

E. And my H. And him, Jay, and H. always called me B., though no one else did. I tried some anagrams, didn't come up with anything. Decided it was a coincidence. Some things were nothing more than that, after all.

We talked about trivial things—my movies, the band he played keyboards for, his job debugging code. After a while I said, "When do you think it'll come?"

Then we heard the hum and rattle, felt the air come pushing down the tunnel. We both stood up. A headlight appeared in the dark, a strange pale white light that illuminated Jay's face. He looked absolutely terrified.

The train pulled up before us. Just one car. The front compartment was all dark glass, the driver (if there was one) hidden. The train was white, not silver like a normal BART train, and it was streamlined, organic, all of a piece. It looked like it had been carved from a single enormous thighbone.

The doors slid open with a hiss of compressed air. I stepped forward. Jay didn't move. I looked at him. He was on the edge of running away, though he wouldn't get far, since we were locked down

go when the danger *gets* you. It's the land of the lowest energy level. But we're here to change things, to take someone out . . . so, yeah, I think it's dangerous." Though I wasn't sure how I knew things like this—magic, the supernatural, everything outside of, over, and under the reality most people inhabit their whole lives—could be unpredictable.

"I read Dante in college," Jay began.

"Don't think that way. Dante wrote a political treatise, a love poem, a spiritual meditation. He wasn't drawing a map. You can't map this place." I pointed. "Let's follow the buzzing bees. If there's a path, stay on it."

We passed through the dark wood. Was the sky empty of stars, or were we in an enormous cavern underground? It didn't matter, really, but my mind worried at the question, to keep from wondering where H. was, I guess. This wasn't my journey. I was the catalyst, the facilitator, nothing more, and I wanted to keep it that way.

Pretty soon we came to a clearing, a circle surrounded by trees, and there was E.

Jay gasped. I just stared.

E. was a beehive. I couldn't tell if she'd ever been pretty, or if

Continued on page 98

The Saint Incident

Sometimes lessons in faith are learned the hard way, and sometimes they're missed altogether.

BY KAGE BAKER • ILLUSTRATION BY DAVE LERI

"WE SHOULDN'T HAVE KILLED THE PRIEST," said the first soldier

He was one of three who fled from the long, high smoke pall of the burning city, and he glanced back now to see what white rider might be flying over the fissured plain, following them.

Don't be stupid, what else could we have done?" said the second soldier. "He swung an axe at us. That made him a Combatant, see? So it was all right."

"But he cursed us, before he died," said the first soldier uneasily.

"So what?"

"So then the earthquake hit!"

"It didn't get us, did it?" said the third soldier, as he jogged steadily on.

"It got our side," said the first soldier, whose name was Spoke. "One minute we're a conquering army, the next minute the Duke's buried under a wall and we're on the run!"

"It got plenty of the Briscians too," said Mallet, the second soldier, panting from the weight of the burden he carried. "And the Duke never paid us much anyway, did he? So to hell with him, and the priest, and the whole business. We're clear away with a fortune, that's all I know. That's called *good* luck."

"We're not clear yet," said Spoke, and an aftershock followed as if on cue, making them all stagger.

"Shut up!" said the other two soldiers, and they ran on, and Spoke turned his face too and ran on, peering desperately up at the hills. Only he who rode behind Mallet regarded the flaming devastation, now, staring from the leather pack with wide sapphire-colored eyes. If the prayers of the dying reached his golden ears, he gave no sign, for his faint smile altered not in the least.

BY NIGHTFALL THEY HAD MADE THE COVER OF THE trees and followed a stream up its course, crossing back and forth to throw off anything that might be tracking them by scent. They crawled the face of the wide-exposed stone gorge, expecting any moment to be nailed in place by pistol bolts, but no one attacked, and when they lay gasping at the top Spoke said, "I don't like this. It's too easy."

"Easy!" said Mallet, who had carried on his back a statue weighing more than a child. He slipped off his pack with a groan and set it upright, but it toppled over and the golden figure struck the rock, ringing hollowly. Spoke cringed.

"And that's a bad omen!" he said.

The third soldier, whose name was Smith, sat up. "If it was," he said, "I'd think it'd be a bad omen for the Briscians, wouldn't you? Their saint falling over?"

"You're both idiots," said Mallet. "Omens! Portents! My ass."

"If you'd seen what I've seen over the years, you'd be a little more respectful," Spoke persisted.

"My ass," Mallet repeated.

Spoke crawled to the statue and slipped it from the pack, handling it gingerly. He set it upright before them, knelt, and cleared his throat.

"Blessed saint, have mercy on us. We are poor men in need, and we fought only for pay. Our Duke is dead, maybe by your just anger, so be appeased, and take no further revenge on us. We promise to atone."

Mallet snorted. "I promise to take that thing straight to the first goldsmith I find. The eyes alone are probably worth a farm."

Wincing, Spoke cried, "Judge us separately, blessed saint! Rebuke *his* blasphemy as you see fit, but accept my contrition and spare me."

"Oh, that's lovely," said Smith. "So much for being comrades-in-arms, eh?"

"Haven't you ever heard any stories about this kind of thing?" said Spoke. "Remember what happened to Lord Salt when he mocked the Image at Rethkast?"

Mallet just shook his head in disgust and got up, looking about them. He moved off into the trees, picking up broken branches as he went.

Smith slipped off his own pack and rummaged in it for flint and steel. "Have you ever noticed," he said, "how those stories are never about ordinary people like us? It's always Lord This and Prince That who piss off the gods and get blasted with balefire."

"Well, there could be a good reason for that," said Spoke. "High-born people get noticed, don't they? If they're punished for sin, every one sees. Makes a better example than if the punishment fell on nobodies."

"So the gods think like men?" said Smith, standing up to peer through the shadows. He pulled down a low bough and yanked free a handful of trailing moss, rubbing it between his fingers to see whether it was dry enough to take a spark.

"They must think like men," argued Spoke seriously. "At least, when they're dealing with us. They have to use logic we'll understand, don't they?"

Smith ignored him, breaking off dry twigs and settling down to the business of starting a fire. He had a little creeping flame established by the time Mallet came back with an armload of dead wood. The wood caught, the flames leaped up; the clearing above the gorge lit in a small circle, and the black shadows of the trees leaned back from it all around.

"Good," grunted Smith, stretching out his hands. He slipped off his helmet and went down to the water's edge, where it ran shallow and transparent over the smooth rock before plummeting down in mist. Here he rinsed his helmet out, and brought it back full of water. Arranging three stones close against the flames, he propped it there where it would take heat. After a moment, the other two men followed his example.

They sat in silence, watching for the water to steam. Spoke, however, turned his troubled gaze now and again to the image of the saint.

"Was his face pointed toward us, before?" he said at last.

"Of course it was."

"I thought—it was looking straight ahead."

The other two glanced over their shoulders at the statue.

"You're right!" said Mallet. "Oh dear, what'll we do now? There Holy Saint Foofoo sits, taking advantage of the fact that all these jumping shadows make him look eerie as hell. As soon as he's got us good and scared, you know what he's going to do? He'll start creeping toward us, a little at a time. Only when we're not looking, naturally."

"Shut your face!"

"He'll come closer, and closer, and then—"

"Stop it!"

"Then he'll realize he's two feet tall and armed with a teeny little golden tambourine in one hand and a—what is that thing in his other hand?" Mallet squinted at it. "A silver toothpick?"

"It's supposed to be a dagger," said Smith.

"Oh, I don't know how I'm ever going to fall asleep tonight, with a supernatural menace like that around," said Mallet.

Spoke stared into the fire.

"It was looking straight ahead," he murmured.

"You couldn't have seen that, as dark as it was here," said Mallet.

Smith shrugged and took up his pack again. He pulled out a ration block wrapped in oiled paper, a little the worse for wear after being knocked around in the company of his other gear. He opened it, picked off dirt and lint, and broke a few chunks into the water in his helmet, which was beginning to steam slightly.

"Let me tell you about something that happened in our village,"

said Spoke. "All right? We had a saint of our own. She watched over the harvest and she kept away the marsh fevers. And if you had a toothache, you could pray to her, and she'd heal you *every time*. All you had to do was leave offerings in her shrine. And make sure her image was kept polished."

"Well, one time, somebody's little boy went in there and left a lump of butter in the statue's open hand. He thought she'd like it. But it was summer, and the butter melted, and then dust blew in from the road and stuck to the mess. When the old priest saw it, he thought somebody'd been disrespectful, and he cursed whoever'd done it. And, do you know, the child was taken ill that very night? And he burned with fever until his mother figured out what he'd done, and she went and made an offering in apology. And right away the child got better."

"Some saint!" said Mallet, turning bits of ration block into his helmet.

"Well, it would have been the priest's mistake, not the saint's," conceded Smith.

"**DAMN RIGHT; A STATUE CAN'T MAKE MISTAKES,**" said Mallet.

"And I'll tell you something else that happened!" said Spoke. "The old priest died, and we got a new one. But he wasn't a holy man. He was greedy, and people began to notice that the offerings were disappearing from the shrine, almost as soon as they were put out. When pig-slaughtering time came around, somebody left a beautiful plate of blood sausages in front of the saint's image, but they disappeared the same night."

"Was this shrine outdoors, by any chance?" asked Mallet.

"Listen to what happened, before you laugh!" said Spoke. "This priest had a mole on his face—"

Mallet began to chortle.

"And from that night it began to grow, you see? It got huge, hanging down the front of his face, and it turned dark red and looked *exactly* like a blood sausage!"

Mallet fell back, guffawing, and Smith snickered. Spoke stared at them, outraged.

"You think this is funny?" he demanded. "This really happened! I saw it with my own eyes! And finally the priest died of shame, but before he did, he confessed he'd been stealing the offerings left for the saint."

"**SOUNDS LIKE HE DIED OF A TUMOR, TO ME,**" said Mallet. "And I have news for you. All priests feed themselves on the stuff left at shrines. In my city, they did it openly. And what's so unusual about a child getting a fever? Children are always getting fevers. Especially in marshy country. Especially where people are too ignorant and superstitious to go to a doctor instead of a priest."

So you're a skeptic," said Spoke, as though the word had a bad taste.

I'm a sane man," said Mallet. "And proud of it, brother."

I did see something I couldn't explain, once, though," said Smith thoughtfully.

"I've seen—"

Spoke made a strangling noise and jumped to his feet. He pointed at the statue.

It turned its head!" he cried.

"No, it didn't," said Mallet wearily, tasting his soup. Smith turned to look, and went a little pale.

"It is facing the other way now," he said.

"It's just your imagination," said Mallet.

"No, I'm sure—"

"I saw it move!" said Spoke. "Are you both crazy? Look at it!"

"It looks the same to me," said Mallet. "But if it did move—well, it's sitting on an uneven surface, right? And we're outdoors. The wind could have shifted it."

"It's too heavy for the wind to shift," said Smith.

"Then, it didn't move," said Mallet with finality. "And if you think you saw it move, then your eyes were playing tricks on you, because statues don't move."

"Look at it," said Smith. "I'm not joking, Mallet."

Mallet turned and looked. "I didn't notice which way it was facing before. It might have been facing that way, for all I know. We're dead tired, we haven't eaten in hours, and we breathed in a lot of

The statue watched them all WITHOUT COMMENT, AS THE LIGHT danced on its golden face.

smoke. How can we trust what we see?"

Smith looked from Mallet to the statue, shook his head, and leaned forward to stir his soup. Spoke backed away a few paces, watching the statue in silence. After a long moment he sat down again, and without taking his eyes off the statue reached for his helmet. It was hot, and he drew back his hand with a cry of pain.

"Uh-oh! Another bad omen," said Mallet.

"Just shut up," said Spoke.

Smith slipped out of his jacket and used it to lift his helmet from the fire, gingerly, and propped the helmet between his boots as he dug in his pack for a tin cup. He dipped out some of the soup and blew on it to cool it. Mallet followed his example. Spoke did not. The statue watched them all without comment, as the light danced on its golden face.

"Aren't you going to eat?" Smith inquired of Spoke.

"Not yet," said Spoke.

"Can we have your soup, then?" asked Mallet.

"Go ahead," said Spoke.

"Oh, come on!" said Smith. "You can't be so scared of that thing you don't eat. That's stupid."

"Let him suit himself," said Mallet, slurping his portion.

"I'll have it later, then," said Spoke. Mallet looked sidelong at Smith.

"So," he said, "how'll we divide watches?"

"I'll take first watch," said Spoke.

"All right," said Mallet slyly. "That all right with you, Smith?"

"Fine," said Smith. He glanced over at the statue.

They finished their soup, lifting the helmets to get out the bits that hadn't dissolved, and pulled blankets out of their packs.

"I'm dead tired," said Mallet. "Aren't you, Smith?"

"Too bloody right I am," Smith replied. He felt about on the rock with his hands, trying to find a place where its bumps and hollows roughly corresponded with his own. Giving up at last, he wrapped himself in his blanket and settled down. Mallet spread his blanket out and opened Spoke's pack.

Spoke!" Smith crawled to his side. He pulled the axe free, slow blood rose from the neat squared hole, ran down into Spoke's left eye.

"It was his own fault," said Mallet. "You saw."

"Well, he's dead, whoever's fault it was," said Smith. He dropped the weapon in disgust. "What do we do now?"

"Real things can be
MEASURED WITH calipers. WE LIVE
in a rational world."

"I'll just borrow your blanket, then, Spoke, since you'll be sitting up," he said. "You won't mind, eh?"

"No. I won't mind," said Spoke.

Mallet fed a couple of sticks into the fire. He stretched out beside it. Smith shifted to make room for him, glancing one more time at the statue. It did not seem to have moved, but he couldn't be sure.

An hour went by. Tired as he was, Smith couldn't drop off. The stone on which he lay seemed to suck all the heat from his body. As he was debating whether to get up and move closer to the fire, he felt Mallet sit up abruptly.

"Drop that right now," said Mallet. Smith rolled over and saw Spoke, backing away from the fire, clutching the statue in his arms.

"I'm saving all our lives," said Spoke. "I'm taking this back."

"ARE YOU CRAZY?" SMITH SAID. "THE BRISCIANS will cut you to pieces!"

"You idiot, that's our retirement pay," said Mallet, who had thrown the blanket aside and scrambled to his feet. He was holding a spike axe in his hand. "I knew you were going to do something stupid. Give it here!"

"I—" said Spoke, but Mallet lunged forward and grabbed the statue by one raised arm, the one bearing a tiny dagger.

"Give it here!"

"No!"

And it seemed to Smith, as he stared at them, that the golden figure writhed like a living thing between them, turned its shining body, and Spoke must have seen it too because he gasped and let go. Mallet pulled it away from him.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "I'll fix your holy saint right now. I'll pound the damn thing into pieces right here. The goldsmiths won't care—"

He knelt and set the statue on the rock, preparing to hit it with his spike axe, but Spoke leaped forward.

"You mustn't—"

Mallet turned and swung at him in exasperation, hitting him squarely between the eyes with the spike end of the weapon. Spoke halted where he was, staring, and Smith sat bolt upright.

"Holy gods, what've you done?"

"Shit," said Mallet. He pushed at Spoke, who toppled backward on his heels and fell, smacking his head on the rock, carrying with him Mallet's spike axe that was firmly stuck in his skull.

"I didn't mean to do that," said Mallet, breathing hard.

"You killed him," said Smith in horror.

"I didn't even hit him that hard," said Mallet. "Stupid bastard! If he hadn't been so superstitious—"

"Pitch him over the edge," said Mallet, nodding at the falls. "I'm not sleeping by a corpse."

"What, without even saying a prayer?" demanded Smith. "You can't be afraid his ghost is going to come make faces at you!"

"Of course I don't believe in ghosts!" said Mallet. "But it's stupid to camp by dead meat in a forest. The smell will attract wolves. Lions. Who knows?"

Smith swore at him. He dragged the body to the edge of the rock and arranged its limbs in a less undignified way. After searching through the pockets, he crossed the hands on its chest and stood with head bowed, murmuring a prayer under his breath.

"As though that'll help him," muttered Mallet. "That's what got him killed, you know. That kind of thinking. And he'd have died anyway, if he'd gone back to the city. The Briscians would have killed him, and not quickly either. As it was, he died in a split second. Didn't he?"

Smith glared at him but did not miss a word of his prayer. When he had finished, he nudged the body forward with his boot, over the edge, and it rolled from the firelight and dropped, vanished into the shadow. A moment later, from far below, he heard a *smack* and winced, hoping the body had landed in the water at least.

He walked back to the fire and sat down across from Mallet. The statue lay still where Mallet had dropped it, smiling up at the forest canopy and the few stars.

"Well, that's done it for me sleeping here tonight," Smith said. "I'll keep watch and you can sleep, or we can both push on."

"Maybe it'd be wisest to go," Mallet agreed. He looked at the statue again and cleared his throat. "But it would still be a good idea to break the damn thing up, don't you agree? That way we can split the weight. You'll get your share, I'll get mine, and if we decide to go our separate ways, well, the loot's already divided. You can have one of the eyes. I'll take the other."

"Whatever you say," Smith replied curtly.

"I think they must be aquamarines," said Mallet, reaching for his spike axe. "The Tyrant at Dehantiba buys them for his mistress, did you know? Has a standing offer out for good ones. Maybe I'll go there."

He put his hand down to steady the image before he struck.

There was a flash of gold, a glint in the firelight, and Mallet howled and drew his hand back. Smith jumped to his feet.

It stabbed you!

"No, it didn't," said Mallet, clutching his hand. "A coal popped in the fire, that's all. A spark jumped."

"I saw its arm move! It stabbed you with that little dagger!"

"Don't be stupid," said Mallet, lifting his hand to his mouth. He sucked the flesh at the base of his thumb. Smith stared at him a

moment, and then grabbed for Mallet's hand. Mallet ducked away, rolling over.

"Let it alone!" he said, putting his hand inside his shirt, but Smith glimpsed the bright blood-bead.

"That's not a burn, that's a wound," he said. "It could be poisoned! What's the matter with you?"

"THERE'S NOTHING THE MATTER WITH ME," SAID MALLET, evening his breath. "But I'll tell you what's wrong with *you*. It's the power of suggestion, isn't it? You and Spoke, the pair of you, you were raised to buy into everything the priests said. So all that superstitious horseshit preys on your minds. See? Even though you know better now. Here we are in the dark in the woods, and we've been seeing death all day, and—wouldn't you think Spoke'd have had more sense than to start scaring himself? And you?"

"Look, I know what I saw," said Smith.

"No, you know what you *think* you saw," said Mallet doggedly. "It's all in your mind. You're so worked up, after what happened, that your brain's making ghosts out of everything. The mind does that. It's not reliable."

"Well, your burn is bleeding through your shirt," said Smith.

"No," said Mallet, with elaborate patience. "You only think you see blood."

"Oh, you jackass," said Smith, and went back to his side of the fire, giving the statue a wide berth.

There was a long moment of silence. Mallet stared into the fire.

"Or I'll tell you what else it might be," he said at last. "There was an earthquake today, right? And we're still getting aftershocks. Well, that could be affecting our minds too. Making us hallucinate. Something in the rocks maybe, quartz veins clashing together and all. I've heard it makes animals go crazy. Hell, aren't we sitting on a big rock? So there you are."

He was sweating, and his face had gone pale under the soot and dust of the day.

SMITH SPOKE IN AS REASONABLE A VOICE AS he could.

"I'm not arguing with you," he said. "I don't believe in omens any more than you do, and I don't think the saint in Spoke's village worked miracles. I'm just saying there might be something going on we don't understand."

"No!" said Mallet. "Don't you see that the minute you believe in craziness like this, you open the door and let in the monsters? Give in this much and you'll believe anything. What you can see with your own eyes is all there is, man."

"But you just got through telling me I couldn't trust my eyes," said Smith. "Or my mind. And if we can't believe our senses, then how can we perceive anything? There might really be fairies in the flowers. How would we know?"

"The point is," said Mallet, with some difficulty, "the point is, everything can be explained. All right? Real things can be measured with calipers. We live in a rational world."

Smith stared at him. "You're a *soldier*," he said. "How the hell can you think we live in a rational world?"

Mallet just gazed at the fire. He sighed, and his hand dropped down on his lap. Smith saw clearly the dried blood, the livid swelling that had spread up his arm.

"That thing's poisoned you," he stated.

"No," said Mallet thickly. "Scorpion hiding in the firewood. Maybe. And we didn't see it."

There was a tiny noise, like the muffled chime of a bell. Smith glanced over to see that the image had indeed turned its head, was looking straight at Mallet now. Mallet raised his eyes too, looked into the statue's bright eyes.

"Scorpion," he repeated. "S'all."

The chime came again. The statue was raising its arm, the one with the tambourine, slow but unmistakable.

"Mallet," said Smith, very quietly. "let's get out of here."

"What?" said Mallet. "Nothing there. Nothing to be scared of. It's just the play of the light."

"Mallet, the damn thing's moving *right now*."

Mallet said nothing else. He leaned over and lay down, as though he were tired, and his breath began to rattle in his throat.

Smith got up, edged his way around the far side of the fire, and caught hold of Mallet's leg.

"Come on," he whispered. Mallet didn't reply. He dragged Mallet a few feet and realized he was dragging dead weight. Mallet stared up sightless, and now Smith could see that the livid swelling had spread all the way to his throat.

Smith let go. Mallet's leg dropped like a sandbag. Smith looked over at the statue. It smiled still. Was it moving?

He backed away, crouching as he went, not taking his eyes off the statue, into the running shallows until water rushed over the tops of his boots. He felt around for a rock. Here. His hands told him he had hold of a good one, the size of a melon, water-smoothed and flat on one side. He hefted it experimentally. Then he lifted it over his head and pitched it at the statue.

It landed with a crash and the distinct sound of breaking pottery. The fire leaped up, bright, shining on Mallet's dead face.

Smith walked up the bank slowly, but nothing happened. He squelched around the perimeter of the fire. Picking up a long branch from the pile of firewood, he levered the rock to one side.

The image of the saint lay in pieces. It wasn't gold after all, only gilded, though the gears and springs inside it, all its subtle mechanisms, shone like something precious.

Smith poked through it with the stick. Here was the little glass reservoir, shattered, leaking green venom now, and here was the clever tube that had sent its charge of poison up into the hollow dagger. Here was the lead weight in the base, where the pulleys had anchored that moved the golden limbs. Was this a switch here, cleverly concealed? Had it been jostled in the rout, or when it had fallen over? What were these characters, inscribed to either side of it? Did they spell out, in fabulously archaic Briscian, BLESS and CURSE?

Or merely ON and OFF?

THE FACE HAD BEEN CRACKED OPEN, AND BOTH BLUE stones knocked loose. Smith prodded them each a safe distance from the rest of the debris, and bent and slipped them into his pocket. He pushed the rest of it into the coals, adding more wood to the fire. Then he went back to his blanket, sat down, and pulled off his wet boots.

For a while there were strange popping and chiming noises from the fire, and every so often the flames leaped up in peculiar colors. The wood lasted until morning.

He walked all the way to Deliantiba to see if he could find a buyer for the stones, but the jeweler he consulted laughed in his face. He was kind enough to show Smith a case of real aquamarines; then he showed him foil-backed paste stones, and invited Smith to judge for himself what he had.

A girl in a public house admired them, so he gave them to her in exchange for a plate of fried fish.

Seamstress

Where did the Fairy Godmother get that gown? We all know that magic has its cost, but who do we think is paying the bill?

I sew a straight seam. Using silken thread and a bone needle, I sew seed pearls onto damask that glows like sapphires in the golden candlelight by which we work. I stitch cobwebs of lace onto petticoats. I sew stays of whalebone into wasp-waisted ball gowns.

I've given the Fairy Godmother a lot of thought. There's plenty of time for thinking when you're hemming a series of virgin-white calico nightdresses with dainty lace at neckline and cuffs. The stitches, the Overseer insists, must be no bigger than a grain of sand.

As I said, we sew by candlelight.

My eyesight is not what it once was.

So, the Godmother. She takes ragged, smudged things and turns them into beautiful Princesses. Why, I don't know. A hobby? A calling? An obsession? Is she righting the wrongs done to her when she was young?

When I first started here, I had a fantasy. That the Godmother would pluck me out of the row of humpbacked, squinting Seamstresses and make me, too, a beautiful Princess. With a gown sewn by … well, by the poor wenches too old or ugly to catch the Godmother's eye.

But, alas, it was not meant to be. Here I sit. Have sat. Will sit. Time passes; we stitch. As the time has passed I have grown, like the others, humpbacked from bending over my work and crook-fingered from gripping the needle. My tired eyes burn and run with tears at the least provocation. And I have come to understand that drawing the Fairy Godmother's attention is the last thing I'd ever want to do.

I know that there was something before this. Now and then an old Seamstress goes blind or her hands grow too gnarled with arthritis to hold a needle, and she is taken away, never to be seen again. To be replaced, later, with a fresh young girl who looks around, dazed, as she is led to the old one's place and handed a needle and told to get to work. It's hard to remember but I think I, myself, was one of those girls, once. We had to come from somewhere, didn't we?

We sit and stitch in two rows at a long wooden table; a meager candle burns at each Seamstress's elbow and the Overseer, who has scaly feet beneath her gown, slithers up and down the room peering over our shoulders. Her job is to maintain order. No talking is permitted. Anyway, what would we have to talk about?

By Sarah Prineas · Illustration by Lori Koetoed

Oceans of silk and satin ebb and flow from one end of the table to the other, washing up here for an embroidery at the hem, there for a fall of ruffles, and back to me for another spangling of seed pearls. Our own dresses are plain shifts of undyed cotton with an apron over the top. We keep our clothing and ourselves scrupulously clean because dirty fingers might smudge the cloth or the thread.

We stitch. I find myself drifting with the tidal flow of flounces and furbelows. The Overseer's breath is cold on my neck, her forked tongue flickers at my ear. Swifter! Smaller stitches! Straighter seams!

I sew. Smaller stitches, straighter seams. Tears have worn pathways down my face.

The door at one end of the long room flies open, and the Shoemaker bursts into the room. The candle flames waver in the wind of his arrival. "A bloody glass slipper?" he shouts, waving a scrap of pink paper. "A shoe made of glass? I'm a shoemaker, not a glassblower!"

At his unexpected fierceness, a few heads bob up, surfacing from the placid stitch-stitch-stitch for a brief moment, bleary eyes taking in the scene, hearts beating with the pitter-patter of curiosity and fear. Then the heads jerk down again.

The Overseer glides up to him. "Certainly some mistake," she hisses. "Show me the requisition. Sahhh. A simple misspelling. The slippers are supposed to be fur. Fur slippers."

The Shoemaker frowns and runs a hand through rumpled, graying hair. "I don't know. It says *verre*, that's glass."

"Yesss, but it's supposed to be fur. *Vaire*. See?" She points at the pink requisition form.

"I don't think so." The Shoemaker shakes his head, decisive. "No. Last time I tried doing it my way, I was sorry after."

I'd been sorry, too. He'd gotten 50 lashes for making dogskin slippers instead of the doeskin ones that had been ordered. He claimed he'd misread the requisition, though I have my doubts about that. The Shoemaker is troublesome. I wouldn't put it past him to design subtle mockery into a pair of slippers. But apparently he's learned his lesson.

"Could you do it with a pattern?" the Overseer asks.

The Shoemaker shrugs, suddenly resigned. The pink requisition form flutters to the floor. "I'll work something out." As he turns to leave, he catches me looking at him. I don't dare offer up a smile, but he must understand the suggestion in my eyes, for he gives the slightest nod in return.

After he goes, the Seamstresses are unsettled. Whispers are heard, the Overseer's watchful gaze darts here, there, trying to catch us out.

The Seamstress next to me leans over and speaks without taking her eyes from her work. "Do you think the Shoemaker is good looking?"

I sit up straighter, astonished at her daring. Sneaking a quick side ways glance, I see that she is young, with chestnut hair and fading blue eyes that once might have been merry. At the far end of the room, the Overseer's head comes up, alert, her mouth open to sense the air. I bend over my work. Without looking at my neighbor, I breathe, "Do you?"

Her only reply is a faint snort. A short time later she whispers, "We had much better looking men in our village."

The Overseer's head swivels toward the sound.

I and the other Seamstress stitch furiously at our seams until her slit-eyed gaze slides away.

I sneak another glance at the Seamstress beside me. She bites off a thread and casts me a wink.

"Do you remember your village?" I whisper.

She gives an almost imperceptible nod. "I remember my name, too. It's Marya."

I think about that for a while. She could be lying. None of us is supposed to remember anything. Except for our skills, of course. How could she sit here stitching her life away if she had any memories of before? I decide that she's lying.

"Well, do you think he's handsome?" Marya whispers, when the Overseer is busy inspecting another Seamstress's work.

She's back to the Shoemaker again. She wasn't here when he was flogged for the dogskin slippers.

Now and then we are ordered to put down our work and file into the walled courtyard outside our sewing room. In the middle of the courtyard stands a wooden post, and it was there that the Shoemaker was chained, shivering in an icy wind. We Seamstresses were lined up to watch, joined by the other laborers: the hatters, the lacemakers, the spinners of gold into straw, the candlemakers, the glovers, the gem-cutters, and so on. A row of uniformed guards faced us. The Godmother, wearing a sable cape and muff, sat on a golden chair on a dais raised above the frozen ground. She made no speech, she simply waved a languid hand and a pig-snouted guard stepped forward, took one or two practice swings, and proceeded to whip the Shoemaker bloody. The courtyard echoed with the sound of braided leather meeting flesh. It was all I could do to stay on my feet. He was hanging in his chains by the time the pig was done, but he never cried out.

Handsome is not the word I would use to describe the Shoemaker.

Marya makes her impatience for an answer known in the abrupt way she ties off and snips a thread.

Finally, I shrug.

She rolls her eyes and opens her mouth to whisper something else. But in her enthusiasm she's lost vigilance.

"Sssso, something to say?" The Overseer peers over Marya's shoulder, her tongue flicking eagerly in and out of her mouth. A scaly hand descends onto the girl's shoulder.

Marya flinches and her eyes widen. "N-no, Overseer," she whispers, all trace of clarity gone.

The Overseer draws back her head and narrows her eyes. "Sahhh. Possibly a chastisement is necessitated. Yes?"

Marya bites her lip; her hands are trembling and her face has gone petticoat-white.

"A Seamstress's purpose is to stitch," the Overseer says, pushing her face up to Marya's. "Stitch and stitch. Not to converse, not to speculate. Stitch. Understand?"

Marya sits frozen.

"Seamstress has no history," the Overseer continues. "Nothing behind, nothing before. Seamstress that speaks will have her tongue severed."

Tears drop from Marya's eyes, watering the silk that has gusted onto her lap. She nods and takes a trembling stitch.

The Overseer opens her mouth to continue her harangue.

I poke my needle into a pincushion and turn to face the Overseer. "I asked her if she could see well enough." My voice seems to echo in the silent room. The rows of Seamstresses pause for a moment in their work, then commence stitching again. But ears are pricked.

The Overseer jerks around to face me. "Sahhh?"

"I said that we haven't enough light to sew by." I point to the guttering candle at my elbow. "We could do finer work if we had better light."

The Overseer blinks. She closes her mouth and straightens, gazing at me as if mesmerized.

I hold my breath.

"So," she says at last. "I see."

To my relief, she folds her hands and glides away to resume her watchful duties.

A time later, two horned, goat-footed guards bring in boxes of fresh waxen candles, which are lit and placed at our elbows. The other Seamstresses cast me wondering glances. Marya sits like a stone beside me, and stitches.

"Are you all right?" I whisper.

She stares at her work and does not answer.

For a time I stitch and think. My history is a blank. Marya remembers a village, handsome men, her name. I don't know what I would do if I had all that behind me and nothing before. The candles burn down and are replaced with new ones. A bone needle breaks and I reach for another, threading it with emerald-colored silk to match the gown I am hemming.

An odd stillness interrupts my thoughts. Marya has stopped working. She sits beside me on the bench staring at her unmoving hands. The Overseer's back is turned, but when she looks around she will see

"Are you all right?" I ask again.

Marya does not answer. Slowly she sets down her needle and pushes a pile of scarlet velvet off her lap. Her movements fluid with remembered grace, she gets to her feet.

The Overseer, distracted, watches her stitches, does not see.

Marya turns and walks to the sewing-room door. The Seamstresses pause in their work, following her with their squinting eyes. This cessation of motion, the Overseer notices. She snaps around. At the same moment Marya throws open the door and flings herself outside. A spate of activity follows, the shouting of guards, a scuffle, the sound of blows. Marya's high-pitched screams. Followed by stillness and silence.

We Seamstresses are on our feet, our faces to the door, our eyes straining to see. The Overseer re-enters, smoothing her dress; there is no sound but the susurration of her footsteps. She looks up, sees us looking.

"Sssssew."

We bow our heads, resume our seats, and sew. We are all wondering what will become of Marya; most of us imagine the flogging post. Some of us might even look forward to witnessing such a punishment, as it breaks up the monotony of our work.

A time later the guards come again. Between them walks Marya, her eyes blank, moving awkwardly, like a collection of sticks pulled by strings. The guards push her into her place beside me on the bench, the Overseer places a threaded needle into her hands and sets her to hemming an apron.

The guards depart. Marya stitches. I watch her out of the corners of my eyes. She stitches, the Overseer replaces the needle and the cloth in her hands, and she continues to sew. Her stitches, I notice, are wide and sloppy. A thread of drool escapes from her mouth and stains the cloth, but she sews on, unnoticing.

We have all thought of doing what Marya has done, but no one, in my memory, has ever tried to escape. It is quite a novelty. I can see why the Godmother has sent Marya back again, even though she has been made useless.

A scream jolts me out of my reverie. Beside me, Marya shrieks again, falls backward off the bench and rolls on the floor, clawing at her stomach. The Seamstresses jump to their feet, some cramming over the table to see, the Overseer races up. Guards are called for, orders are hissed, and in the clear space on the floor Marya writhes and moans.

She's swallowed her needles and now they are piercing her insides. I look on with the rest as two guards, their furry ears twitching in alarm, come in and drag her out, still screaming. She stares at me, blank-eyed, as they carry her past.

Her seat remains empty and the extra work is passed on to the rest of us.

I stitch. Despite the better light, the tears continue to flow from my eyes.

The sound of footsteps and curt orders is heard outside. The door flies open and several guards rush in, their naked tails waving behind them, the Overseer slithers up, hissing her displeasure. An inspection, she is told.

We Seamstresses are made to stand in rows before our table, heads bowed, hands folded neatly before us. Just an inspection, the guards say again, as if trying to reassure us.

For a moment there is silence. Then the Godmother enters. I don't dare look at her, but her presence is obvious in the way the room feels suddenly smaller and darker, and taut with held breaths.

The Godmother stands in the doorway, surveying us. "Good girls," she says. Even though some of the so-called girls are old enough to be grandmothers. The Godmother sweeps into the room, trailed by the Overseer and the nervous guards. She pauses to inspect a bit of embroidery, then proceeds down the row until she reaches me.

I keep my gaze on the stone floor.

"The Overseer says you speak for the others, Seamstress," the Godmother says. The sound of her voice makes me jerk in surprise, my body tingles as if I've been struck by lightning.

But I suppose she's right. I do speak for the others. I manage a nod.

"Well then," the Godmother says. "Is there anything you want? Or need?"

Ah. They don't want a repeat of Marya's messy death. I do assume that she died, eventually. One way or another.

But I will not ask the Godmother for anything. We don't eat or sleep or menstruate or relieve ourselves. What could she give us that she hasn't already taken away? I can sense the other Seamstresses' anticipation, their unspoken requests. "Nothing," I say, and risk an upward glance.

The Godmother regards me for an instant with eyes of blue ice. Her expression says that she is wondering if my refusal to ask her for anything is a veiled rebellion. Her dress is the same frozen color as her eyes. I remember sewing the tiny crystals onto the overskirt. Her delicate nose wrinkles slightly, and she looks away, dismissing my petty resistance, already thinking about something else.

I wonder if she looks the same way at the beautiful Princesses-to-be when they're covered with stains and have dirty fingernails and calluses and hair matted with dirt and grease?

The Godmother's attention fixes on me again. I keep still, the hunted rabbit. She looks me up and down. "Your feet are sufficiently small. The Overseer reports that the Shoemaker has requested you as a model for his shoes, task. You are excused from your duties until he has finished with you."

I am not expected to speak. And it is just as well that I don't have to, for my voice might betray my excitement. If he has asked for me then he must understand what I have been trying to tell him with my furtive nods and suggestive looks.

The Godmother stares at me, waiting. I bob a quick curtsy and she glides regally from the room. The walls step back and take a deep breath after she's gone.

The other Seamstresses cast me jealous looks as they resume their seats; the Overseer ushers me to the door. "Sshhh. You shall spend a short time with the Shoemaker. Serve as his model and so serve your mistress." She tells me how to reach the Shoemaker's room.

I step out the sewing room door. The last time I was outside, to witness his punishment, the air was icy, as it is now, but the sky is dark this time and swirling with snowflakes. I cross the courtyard with it looming at the flogging post and enter the castle. I follow the Overseer's directions, making a left turn here, following that corridor at its end, climbing this staircase, until I come to the Shoemaker's door. As instructed, I knock and enter.

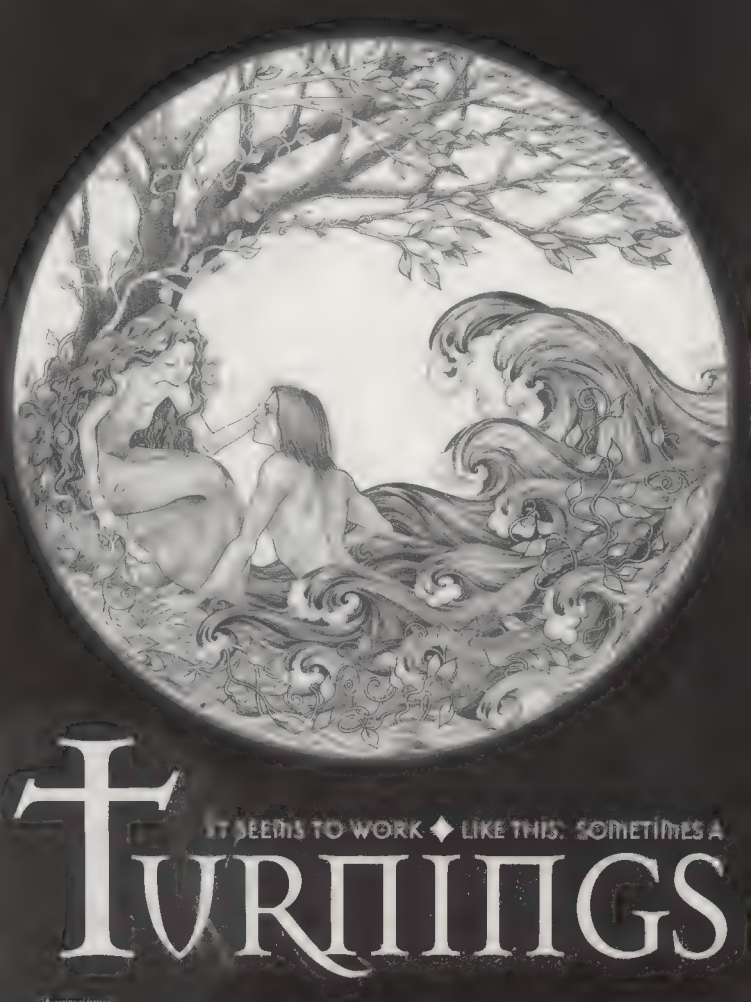
He looks up from his workbench and carefully sets down his tools. "Hurry. We don't have much time."

Without speaking, I go to him, untying my apron. His hands are rough with haste, pulling my cotton shift over my head. He takes off his shirt and spreads it on the stone floor and we lie down together.

It is not love that we make, but we ease each other, and the release is something Seamstress might savor as she sits, hooped, backed and bleary-eyed, stitching ballgowns for willowy maidens. We turn and turn in each others' arms, skin on skin, and make not a sound.

Continued on page 96

From the way I knew how to touch him, I gather that I had other lovers when I lived in the world. My body remembers the act of love the same way my fingers remember how to stitch.


IT SEEMS TO WORK ✦ LIKE THIS. SOMETIMES A
TURNINGS

Choice

By Laura Anne Gilman Illustration by Sheila Rayyan

[illegible] of the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

JOHN BERKEY

Majestic spacecraft, vivid portraiture, and dramatic narrative scenes are Berkey's hallmarks as an illustrator.

By Jane Frank

MASTER

The Blizzard *appeared on the cover of the novel of the same name by George Stone (Dell Books, 1979). INSET: Detail from* The Tour

STORYTELLER

Catastrophy was painted for the cover of the anthology [illegible] Wizards Warriors and Wenches (Harcourt, 1981).

highly successful association with the field even while he was creating advertising art in the American tradition for clients such as Otis Elevator and U S Steel and historical illustrations for *National Geographic*

Whether a flotilla of spaceships plowing through the vastness of space, or rough-hewn figures battling horrific forces, Berkey's more fantastic paintings are not constrained by traditional depictions of wizards and warlocks The realms of fantasy are wide and broad, the stories in this magazine are testament to that! So, it comes as no surprise that Berkey's paintings are just as difficult to classify His Impressionistic approach brings with it a kind of dynamism and spontaneity that make even scientifically based stories come alive and seem "fantastic" Even when clear evidence of space-traveling vehicles are part of the picture, as in Brian Stableford's story "The Tour," there's no denying that fantastic images are the main focus

If you have the luxury of looking at hundreds of paintings by John Berkey—all produced for the purpose of communicating his ideas about objects, people, or events—you will soon be able to pick out this *narrative* or *storytelling* approach. In these paintings you are drawn directly into his world, because his fascination with context (the environment he creates), dialogue (how he communicates his message through his characters), and point of view (his "framing," or position on the subject) are clear There are real heroes here, and real women of beauty, and vibrant colors that match the action. And many of the paintings have graced the covers of—and illustrated the stories in—this very magazine

His fantasy paintings are nothing like the bold, behemoth-sized "space yachts" painted against the backdrop of deep blue interstellar space—for which he is justly famous Those ships can be seen illustrating dozens and dozens of book covers and stories in magazines such as *Science Fiction Age* This style is different but equally compelling, and many of his earliest assignments in the genre were rendered in this representational "telling a story" kind of way

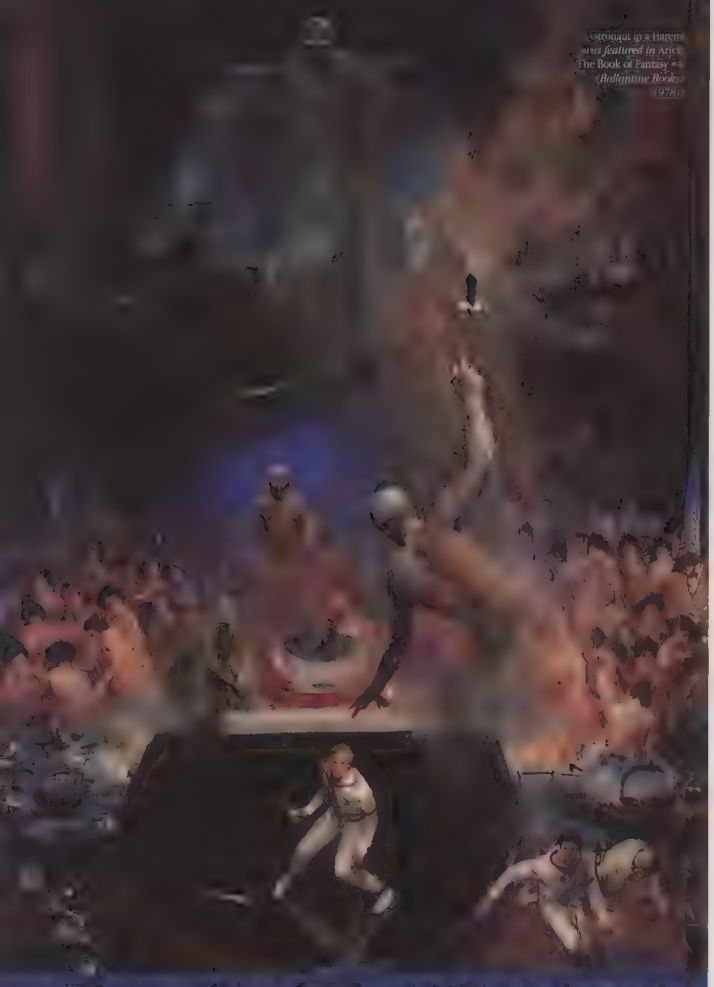
The most successful of Berkey's earliest forays into speculative fiction took their strength from his already identifiable and undeniably successful style of expression Many of his published book covers from the very late 1960s and early 1970s relied heavily on figure work and made full use of his skill, well honed before he became an independent freelance illustrator, in depicting a wide variety of culturally familiar images Berkey's naturalistic style, which made even everyday objects seem to come alive, transferred very appealingly to highly unconventional objects or situations

Earlier paintings from the 1970s, such as *Cloud Walker* and *Astronaut in a Harem* show how his style of expression was perfectly suited to strange futuristic, or fantastic storylines. His representational and more painterly technique readily accommodated the sorts of concepts and scenes you find in science fiction and made the fantastic seem real His spontaneous style lent itself to the depiction of unconventional subject matter in conventional ways

John Berkey's style of expression is difficult to describe, but the science fiction *themes* for which he is probably best known are not Majestic spacecraft, vivid portraiture, and dramatic narrative scenes of environmental destruction are his hallmark as a science fiction and fantasy illustrator

Berkey established and imprinted his signature style of fantasy art on science fiction throughout his early years as a commercial artist, while he was creating movie poster designs for *The Towering Inferno* and *King Kong* and cover art for "mainstream" for magazines such as *TV Guide* He continued this

You are drawn into his world because his



Astrologer in a Harem
was featured in Ariel:
The Book of Fantasy
(Ballantine Books, 1978)

fascination with context, dialogue, and point of view are clear.

The ships in *Cloud Walker* are reminiscent of the detailed, classic sailing ships he produced for Brown & Bigelow calendars, in his fine art style, while the bizarre hot air balloons drift in stark contrast. It is this masterful touch of grotesquene that brings us up short and compels our attention.

Traditional modes of representation were required in the early works he produced for Brown & Bigelow calendars, as well as in his nongenre work for well-known publishers such as *National Geographic*. So—given his imagination and desire—it was relatively easy for him to adapt that American style of Impressionism to the conventions of book and magazine illustration in the science fiction and fantasy genre. Time after time, without allusions to gizmos and high technology, Berkey showed his ability to interpret psychologically powerful or dramatic

The swing is a personal favorite (1981). LEFT: The four illustrates the story by Brian Stableford (Science Fiction Age, January 1998).

scenes in a romantic style that did not in any way conjure up the label "book illustration." His approach to the subject matter common to fantasy literature is distinctive and always carries his signature style.

Carl Gnam, co-owner of Sovereign Media and publisher of this magazine as well as *Military Heritage* and other special-interest magazines, has known the artist for more than a decade and has accessed his talents often over that time. He says "John has probably done more nongenre work than nearly all the other artists in the genre, [but] I think his success in the science fiction field has been based on the fact that he can paint with authority whatever he wants, and that's a skill that made him valuable, [and] with absolutely no fear to paint the most complex images ... all of them with John's special touch and unmistakable style."

Berkey is especially good at depicting fantastic ideas that would have attracted Jules Verne. Natural and man-made disasters and our helplessness and heroism in responding to them. In *The Blizzard*, a science project has gone awry, and a megastorm has buried a shivering and helpless population under mountains of snow. At the opposite end of Mother Nature's spectrum of natural events is the powerful volcanic eruption of *Catastrophy*. Instead of icy terror, he creates a doomsday of monumental proportions—an exploding maelstrom of panicked faces are being swept away before our eyes. In *Fire Against the Sea*, we have a scene much like that in the movie *A Perfect Storm*. The immediacy of the moment grips us, and it's hard to take our eyes away from the grandeur of those waves.

Berkey is also surprisingly entertaining when applying his figurative talents to pure fantasy, as in a series of interior paintings he created for children's books telling stories about Santa Claus. The subject matter is very far from the literary genre that we have come to associate with Berkey, but the characterizations and style

of painting are instantly recognizable and just as compelling. *The Candy Caves* shows us this more whimsical side of Berkey: it's only one of several paintings that underscore his wide-ranging ability and fearlessness in tackling subject matter.

Berkey's impressionistic style captures the emotions in a way that photorealistic styles of painting cannot. His ability to convey a mood through a subtle interplay of colors and patterns is unparalleled in fantasy illustration, and many of his commercial assignments carry over the concepts he pursues in his more experimental, personal works. Often, Berkey's personal works overlap his commercial assignments in intriguing ways.

Compare the artistry of *Love Equals Four, Plus Six* to *The Swing*. Both paintings feature strong, beautiful women, and both echo strong Impressionistic influences as he flirts with perspective and the interplay of patterns; however, we can see how the constraints of publication have affected the creation of a less visually subtle painting in *Love Equals Four*.

The Candy Caves from "The Story of Santa Claus" by Seebbler Wolfe, illustrated by the elves (Ariel Books, Turner Publications, 1995).

LEFT: Five Against the Sea *was created for the cover of the novel by Ron Arias (New A[illegible] by Samuel Cooper (Ballantine Books, 1974).*

Plus Six: Yet, in both paintings, his talent for effectively blending and juxtaposing complex patterns strikes us, and we come to realize, on closer inspection, that the personal work is not as complex as first suggested by the abstracted elements in the composition, nor is the detail in the illustrative work lacking. With deft, simple strokes Berkey conjures up one or multiple groups of people and distinctive personalities in all his narrative paintings.

These two paintings also provide a dramatic example of how many of Berkey's personal works and those produced for publications are similar in their psychological effect. There is a moody, somber quality to his artistry that lifts his paintings beyond those that are merely self consciously fantastic or provocative. They are not illustrative "puffery" simply created to fill an illustrative void. Even the most speculative of them have a *gravitas* that is associated with the best of American fine art.

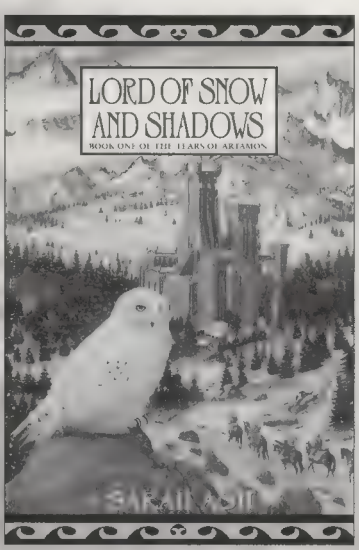
Over the past 40 years or so, Berkey has painted illustrations of incredible variety and beauty, and to our admiring eyes, with seeming effortlessness. The imagery seems to flow onto his canvas with such ease that we forget the hours of research, sketching, and painting that go into producing works of such high quality. Ranging from fantasy-driven, vivid scenes of people engaged in imagined environments to dramatic portraits and poetic montages filled with light and color, Berkey's narrative paintings are as much his hallmark as an illustrator as his monumental spaceships, although they draw us into a completely different universe of fantasy art. ❧

A power passed from generation to generation.

BLOOD WILL TELL.

"Sarah Ash is destined to be one of the brightest luminaries of fantasy."

—Dennis L. McKiernan, author of the *Mithgar* Series



Raised in gentle climes and with a budding career as a court painter, Gavril Andar knows nothing of his heritage, or his father. But blood calls to blood—and the siren song is powerful. . . .

Far away in the harsh, wintry kingdom of Azhkendir, the dragon-warrior is murdered, and the kingdom seeks his heir. Soon Gavril will come into his legacy, only to learn that to defend his birthright, innocent blood must be spilled

"Ash has tapped into the largely unmined motherlode of Eastern European folklore, [and] added in an unusual soupcon of Dracula and dragons."

—Katherine Kurtz, author of the *Crusade of Fire*

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SPECTRA

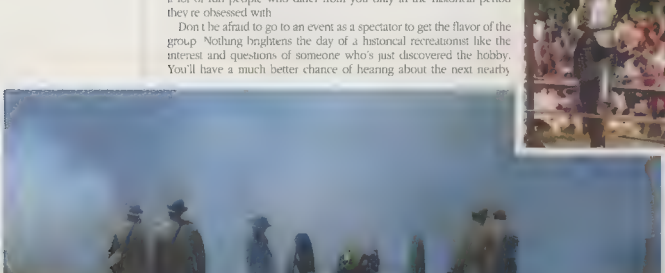
By Emma Bull

The past is your oyster, and this summer holds many pearls.

All right, you would-be time travelers, this month your past lives tour guide has brought the travel brochures with her. I'd like to offer you a sample of the events around the country—and a few outside it—that will provide you with a taste of historical reenactment, medieval fantasy, cowboying up, and many other slices of the past.

A few suggestions before you start browsing. You may think your only interest is in Renaissance fairs or Civil War reenactment, but don't hesitate to visit some of the events celebrating periods you're less familiar with. Certain things are common to all historical and semi-historical recreations. If you're interested in period costume, weapons, music, or food, you'll find someone at any of these events who shares your fascination. You may decide that, say, buck skinning is not the hobby for you. But you'll find new resources, learn new facts, and meet a lot of fun people who differ from you only in the historical period they're obsessed with.

Don't be afraid to go to an event as a spectator to get the flavor of the group. Nothing brightens the day of a historical reenactionist like the interest and questions of someone who's just discovered the hobby. You'll have a much better chance of hearing about the next nearby Rendezvous, the meeting dates of the local Cowboy shooting club, or a new RenFair holding auditions. And do write or call first to ask about any requirements or limitations for spectators.



You can experience Civil War battle reenactments at the Technology of War Weekend at Antietam National Battlefield. PNSET: A knight celebrates victory at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival.

Whether you attend as an audience member or a full-fledged costumed participant, remember to take three things to any outdoor event: water, sunscreen, and facial tissues. Dehydration and sunburn will materially affect your enjoyment of the proceedings. And at well attended events, the portable toilets will run out of toilet paper.

I know I haven't included all the best past lives journeys in the list below, simply because I know I haven't yet found them all. You can help; if you know of a history-related site or event that I haven't mentioned that would appeal to readers of Past Lives, please tell me about it. I'll try to run mini schedule updates as space allows. Address e-mail to me at lcleveland@sovhomestead.com, or letters to me at Realms of Fantasy, 441 Carlisle Dr., Herndon, VA 20170.

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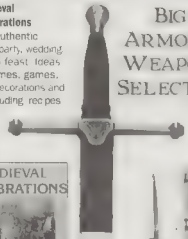

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Take a historic train ride through the San Juan National Forest at the Durango & Silverton Fifth Annual Railfest

The calendar is arranged by starting dates Some events, like the larger Renaissance fairs run into the following month, so be sure to check the end date before you despair of getting in on the fun

MAY 31 - JUNE 30

New Jersey Renaissance Kingdom, South Orange, NJ

Dunn Ivey Productions, LLC, 28 Fordham Rd Somerset NJ 08873; (732) 271-1119, (732) 356-1497

Weekends only, 11 AM to 6 PM. Tulip Springs Picnic Area, South Mountain Reservation, Cherry Lane between Northfield and South Orange Avenues Firearms not permitted Blades and other weapons must be kept sheathed and peace-tied in

JUNE 15 - JULY 27

War of the Lakes XVII, Kansas City, MO

A Society for Creative Anachronism event Pitched battles are period-themed: Romans vs Goths; Mongols vs Russians, English vs Scots Welsh, Irish, etc Vendors, social events, arts and sciences of the Middle Ages Camping available The site, Kelsey Short Youth Camp at Smithville Lake, north of Kansas City, opens at 5 PM on the 13th, closes at noon on the 22nd For more information, go to: http calontir sca org/lakeswar/lakeswar html

JUNE 19 - AUGUST 3

Colorado Renaissance Festival, Larkspur

409 S Wilcox St #F, Castle Rock, CO 91014-1962, (303) 688-6010 Weekends only, 10 AM to 6 30 PM Between Denver and Colorado Springs, north on Spruce Mountain Road from I-25, follow signs

JUNE 19 - 20

Showdown on the Prairie, Ackley, IA

National Congress of Old West Shootist s 10th Annual National Shoot, at NCOWS Prarie Fire Range Firearms clothing, and accouterments must be historically correct for the period 1865-1899 for all contestants Must be NCOWS member to compete Dutch oven supper, "Buffalo Hunt," long-range shoot, and side matches, Chili Feed, Twentieth Territorial Congress, mounted shooting competition, reenactments, vendors Modern camping permitted, authentic camps must be authentic to the period 1865-1899), www swiftsite com/NCOWS index htm

JUNE 20 - AUGUST 16

Bristol Renaissance Faire, Kenosha, WI

Renaissance Entertainment Corp., 12550 120th Ave , Kenosha, WI 53142-7337, (800) 523-2474 (847) 395-7773 Weekends only, 10 AM to 7 PM. Greater Chicago area, west of I-94 at State Line Rd. on the Wisconsin/Illinois state line Firearms not permitted Blades and other weapons must be kept sheathed and peace-tied in

JULY 3-6

Hell on Wheels Shoot Out. Cheyenne, WY

Cheyenne Regulators, 1531 Otto Rd., Cheyenne, WY 82009 Single Action Shooting Society High Plains regional championship At each stage, competitors target-shoot their way through a scenario based on historic gunfights, movie shootouts, or just plain "what if?" using two pistols, rifle, and shotgun Main competition with divisions for black powder shooters, traditional and modern pistols, ladies, seniors, and youth divisions Side matches for long rifle, etc Cowboy Action Shooting classes taught by champion shooter Evil Roy Tea house, steak dinner, Victorian dance lessons and ball, casino, costume contest For more information, www cheyen neregulators com

JULY 4TH WEEK

Fourth of July Celebration, Ft Tejon, CA

Fort Tejon State Historic Park Military garrison life in 1850s California For more information, go to www.forttejon org

JULY 4

Annual Gettysburg Reenactment 140th Anniversary, Gettysburg, PA

The Gettysburg Anniversary Committee, P O Box 3482, Gettysburg, PA 17325-3482, (717)-338-1525; e-mail gacl@blazenet net

Battle reenactments, military camps, civilian camp, Living history village, and living history activity tents, Sutlers Row, selling Civil War era items, original and reproduction New site, three miles north of Gettysburg Grandstand seating for the battles available, but order early

JULY 4-20

Kaltenberg Knight's Tournament, Kaltenberg, Bavaria, Germany

Ritterturnier Kaltenberg GmbH, Schloss-Strasse 8, D-82269, Kaltenberg, Germany 011 49 8193 933 100; (310) 575 9799; Fax 011 49 8193 933 150

Yes, real jousting at a real 11th century castle In real Bavaria Medieval marketplace, parade, and world s largest jousting tournament (stadium holds nearly 13,000 people) Now you seriously want that European vacation Weekends. Approximately 30 miles or 45 km west of Munich, between Augsburg Landsberg am Lech, and Furstenfeldbruck A shuttle bus runs from the train station in Geltendorf to Kaltenberg Castle during the event

JULY 5 - AUGUST 17

Sterling Renaissance Festival, Sterling, NY

Sterling Renaissance Festival, 15385 Farden Rd , Sterling, NY 13156-3275 (800) 879-1446 (315) 947 5783 Weekends only, 10 AM to 7 PM Off SR 104A at Lake Ontario No weapons permitted

JULY 8-17

Louisiana Purchase Historic Dance Week, New Orleans, LA

Celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase 1803, 1853, and 1903 period balls Streetcar party, Natchez riverboat cruise and tea dance, and a Guinguette Soiré Balls will take place at Gallier Hall (New Orleans original City Hall), Pavilion of the Two Sisters and Desirehan Plantation E-mail Ralph McDonald at dancevintagenewor leans@yahoo.com

JULY 18-27

Alaska State Rendezvous, Chena Lakes Recreational Area, North Pole, Alaska

Black powder shooting, mountain man crafts, demonstrations, music, encampment Richardson Hwy to Laurence Rd , north to flood control dam, cross dam and travel 1 6 miles E-mail Jim fnpk1@uaf edu and Kathy fnkk1@uaf edu,www norwestcompany com Rendezvous htm or e-mail for a flier

JULY 19-SEPTEMBER 1

Ontario Renaissance Festival, Hornby, Ontario, Canada

International Renaissance Festivals, Ltd., 6252 Eighth Line, Hornby, ON L0P 1E0, Canada, (905) 878-6948

A very new fair only four years old. Come now, and say you knew them when. Week ends plus August 4, September 1, from 10:30 AM to 7 PM. 6252 Eighth Line, south of Hwy 401, east of Trafalgar Rd, between Derry Rd and Britannia Rd.

JULY 19-SEPTEMBER 1

Warwick Mediaeval Festival, Warwick, England

Warwick Castle, Warwick, Warwickshire, CV34 4QU England. Phone +44 1926 406600. Another Middle Ages event in a country that actually had the Middle Ages. Warwick is a beautiful medieval village, with an appropriate castle. Every day, 10 AM to 6 PM.

AUGUST 1-3

Costume College 2003, Van Nuys, CA

Over 90 classes and programs on all aspects of costuming. Workshops, demonstrations on costume-related projects, lectures on history of clothing and other costume subjects, costume-related tours, plus huge dealers' room, Time Traveller's Gala, and Fantasy Tea. Everything from how to make corsets, to assembling chain mail, to constructing masks, theatrical, historical, science fiction, fantasy, and general costume interests. Membership dead-

For more information on future events in your part of the world, consult these Web sites:

Mountain Man Rendezvous list of events:
www.rondylist.com

Renaissance Fair List:
www.faires.com

Civil War reenactment Living history events, Mid-Atlantic:
www.civilwarva.com/events

History events:
www.tarpit.com

Single-Action Shooting Society
www.sassnet.com

National Congress of Old West Shootists:
www.swiftsite.com/NCOWS/index.htm

The Association for Living History, Farm, and Agricultural Museums
www.alhfam.org

Living History sites and events:
www.alhfam.org/alhfam/links.html

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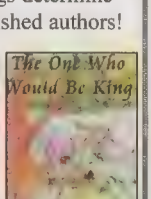

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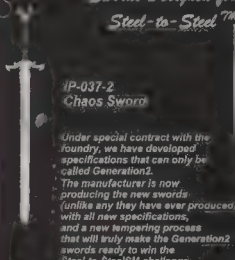

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www.silvermane.com
www.by-the-sword.com

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line for 2003 is June 20, 2003, after which no memberships will be sold. E mail msjess@earthlink.net, write to Costumers Guild West, P O Box 3052, Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670-3052, or call 1-800-350-1111, www costume college org

AUGUST 1-AUGUST 17

Pennsic War 32, Slippery Rock, PA

Coopers' Lake Campground in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvan... The granddaddy of SCA wars, now spanning three full weekends. Castles, field, bridge, woods battles, tourney-style fights, archery contests; battles of champions State dinner, masked ball, period dancing, social events. Arts & Sciences exhibition and classes, choir, Coxcomb Academy, and Poetic Challenge www pennsicwar org

AUGUST 2

The Victorian Adventurers' Ball

San Mateo, CA

A late Victorian fete for Adventurers, Explorers, and "Extraordinary Gentlemen," sponsored by the Period Events & Entertainments Re-Creation Society and hosted by the Adventurers' Club at the Masonic Lodge of San Mateo Live music, waltzes, polkas, quadrille Lancers and other popular dance music of the late 1890s Late Victorian evening dress is admired but not required. Call P E P E R S at (510) 522-173; e-mail peers@peers org or see www peers org

AUGUST 2-3

General McClellan's 1862 Civil War Headquarters, Harrison's Landing, Richmond, VA

Tour includes Living history, the 1726 Manor House, museum, and the "Taps" Monument on the grounds where Union soldiers camped after the 1862 Seven Days Battles At Berkeley Plantation on State Route 5 between Richmond and Wilhamsburg 9 AM - 5 PM Saturday, 9 AM - 1 PM Sunday. Reservations 888-466 6018

AUGUST 2-3

Battle of Warm Springs Reenactment at Hidden Valley, Bath County, VA

Demonstrations, tours, sutlers, and crafters' booths, activities at Warwickton Mansion Battles at 2 PM each day. Reenactments 9 AM - 10 PM Saturdays. Special Saturday night dinner, dance and artillery firing 800-628-8092 or www bathcountyva org

AUGUST 2-17

Washington Renaissance Fantasy Faire

Gig Harbor, WA

Village Artist, 12016 134th Ave., KPN, Gig Harbor, WA 98329. (800) 359-5948, (253) 851-4114 Jousting, equestrian events, Shakespearean plays, living chess match, children's activities, magic, dancing and more. Week ends only. 10 AM to 6 PM Minter Creek Ranch, 10215 State Rt. 302 NW (Cross street Crevison); Take I-5 to Tacoma Hwy. 16 to Purdy State Rd., #302 off ramp to light and over

Colorfully costumed jugglers entertain the crowds at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival

Purdy Bridge. 3.5 miles to site. Blades and other weapons must be kept sheathed and peace-tied in

AUGUST 2-3

Rocky Mountain College Rendezvous 2003

Near Jefferson & Fairplay, Colorado

Pike National Forest, Lost Park off US 285, near the town of Jefferson (Follow the signs) Contact: Paul Hunter, aka Captain Road Kill, P O Box 1268, Elizabeth, CO 80107 orSegundo Roger Petrella, Rogerpr@ix netcom. com A teaching Rendezvous—learn about the North American fur trade Many classes range, State Primitive Shoot, Kids Shoot, storytelling contest, cooking contest, Best Dressed contest, naming ceremony, council fire, camping areas. modern, handicap, short and long term primitive, and rowdy For more information and to verify location, www.bigwolfs-lair.com/rmc htm E-mail paul.w.hunter@worldnet. att. net

AUGUST 3

Dragoon Era Living History

Fort Tejon, CA

Fort Tejon State Historic Park Military garrison life in 1850s California For more information, go to www forttejon org

AUGUST 3 AM

Guns of August, Middletown, OH

The SASS Midwest Regional Championship and the SASS Eastern Nationals Mounted Championship This Single-Action Shooting event offers traditional, black powder, duelist, gunfighter, youth and senior timed shooting scenarios, and cowboy mounted shooting as well, in which competitors shoot out targets from horseback If you love watching fast horses and good riders, you'll get hooked on mounted shooting bigirons Geom/goa.htm Site is the Middletown Sportsmen's Club, 6943 Michael Rd., Middletown, OH 45042 1431

AUGUST 8

Orange County Regency Dance Society

Santa Ana, CA

Wise Place in Santa Ana, 1411 N Sycamore, 7:30-11 00 PM Dances of the English Regency period, all taught, costumes encouraged but not required. Contact David Wilkin at dwwilkin@adelphia net, or call 562 691 5510

AUGUST 9-10

Technology of War Weekend

Antietam National Battlefield, MD

Historic guns, living history demonstrations focus on technological advances during the war. 301-432-5124 or www.nps gov/anti.

AUGUST 11-17

16th Annual Newport Vintage Dance Week

Newport County, RI

A week of dancing amid the splendors of the Gilded Age. At Portsmouth Abbey School on Narragansett Bay. E-mail Newport@VintageDancers org

AUGUST 16-17

Olde Tyme Black Powder Frolic

Forest City Stockade, Forest City MN.

East of Litchfield Mn on Hwy. 24. Fun time to be had by all 'skinners at the Forest City Stockade Primitive round ball weapons only Special events: shotgun, smooth bore rifle, pistol & revolver match Hawk, knife, and spear throwing Games for kids & adults e-mail wolf@hatchtel net

AUGUST 16-SEPTEMBER 30

Michigan Renaissance Festival

Holly, MI

Michigan Renaissance Festival Corporation, 12600 Dixie Hwy , Holly, MI 48442-8416; (248) 634-5552, (800) 601-4848 Weekends plus September 1, 10 AM to 7 PM 12500 Dixie Hwy., 2 miles south of I-75 (exit 106). No weapons permitted.

AUGUST 16-SEPTEMBER 30

Minnesota Renaissance Festival,

Shakopee, MN

Mid-America Festivals, 1244 Canterbury Rd. Ste 306, Shakopee MN 55379-8944, (952) 445-7361 Weekends plus August 1 and August 26, from 9 AM to 7 PM From the Twin Cities, follow Highway 169 south toward Mankato The entrance is 2 miles south of Highway 41. Unloaded period firearms only Blades and other weapons must be kept sheathed and peace-tied in.

AUGUST 16-OCTOBER 26

Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire, Lancaster, PA

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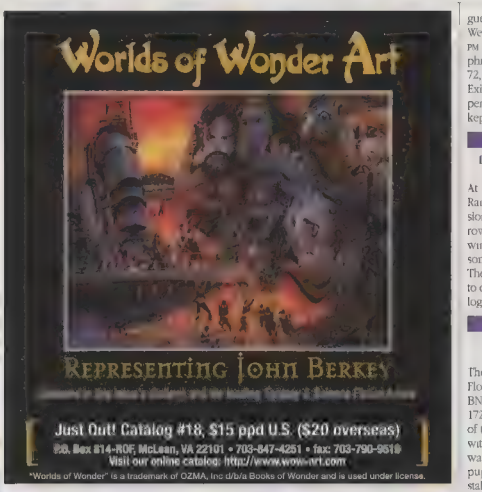
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guests Largest joust arena outside Europe Weekends plus September 1, 9:30 AM to 6:30 PM 83 Mansion House Rd 112 from Philadelphia between Lancaster and Hershey On SR 72, 12 mile south of Pennsylvania Turnpike Exit 20. Firearms not permitted Eating knives permitted Blades and other weapons must be kept sheathed and peace-tied in

AUGUST 21

Durango & Silverton Fifth Annual Railfest

Durango, CO

At the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad and Museum Historic train excursions behind coal fired, steam-powered narrow-gauge locomotives The view out the windows (the San Juan National Forest) is some of the most beautiful scenery in the U S The railroad was founded in 1881 so feel free to dress appropriately Call 1-888-TRAIN-07 or log onto www.durangotrain.com

AUGUST 23-25

Herstmonceux Castle Medieval Festival

Herstmonceux, East Sussex, England

The Malcolm Group Events, Ltd., Ground Floor, 3 Brunswick Place, Hove East Sussex BN3 1EA England, +44 (1273-723249, 0891-172902 Britain's largest three-day celebration of the Middle Ages Hundreds of combatants with cannon support lay siege to the castle walls Jousting, archery, Fire-eaters, falconry, puppeteers, strolling minstrels, period craft stalls, Living history village and Kids kingdom Open 10 AM to 6 PM. In East Sussex, just outside the village of Herstmonceux near Hailsham. This is the only weekend of the year when you can get to the castle by public transport

AUGUST 23-OCTOBER 19

Maryland Renaissance Festival,

Crownsville MD

International Renaissance Festivals, Ltd., PO Box 315, Crownsville, MD 21032-0315 Phone (800) 296-7304, (410) 266-7304 Weekends plus September 1, 10:30 AM to 7 PM Crownsville Road. 12 miles from SR-450. No weapons permitted

AUGUST 23-OCTOBER 19

Ohio Renaissance Festival Harveysburg, OH

Ohio Renaissance Festival, PO Box 68 Harveysburg, OH 45032-0068, (513) 897-7000 Weekends plus September 1, 10-30 AM to 6 PM 817 Brimstone Rd., 5 miles east of Waynesville OH. on SR-73 From I-71, take Exit 45, then west on SR-73 to the festival entrance From I-75 take Exit 48, then east on SR-73 to the festival entrance Blades and other weapons must be kept sheathed and peace-tied in

SEPTEMBER 27

Regency Dance Society Harvest Ball

Sierra Madre, CA

Alta Mount Sierra Masonic Lodge, 33 E Sierra Madre Blvd 7 PM to 11 PM All dances are taught, beginners welcome (beginners

instruction 7-7:15 PM) Refreshments Period costume encouraged but not required http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/RegencyDnz/regency.htm?mtbrand=AOL_US

OCTOBER 6

The Blue Danube Waltz Ball. San Mateo, CA Masonic Lodge of San Mateo Waltzes, polkas, schottisches, mazurkas, polonaises and quadrilles by the Strauss family and other Viennese waltz composers of the 19th century. Mid- to late Victorian ball dress is admired, but not required. For further information call P.E.E.R.S at (510) 522-1731, e-mail peers@peers.org, or see www.peers.org

OCTOBER 7-15

Great Western War VII. Prado Regional Park, Chino, CA

This SCA event draws on an impressive talent pool to produce an amazing array of entertainment and activities. Heavy weapons fighting scenarios and tournaments, rapier, light weapons, archery, equestrian events, Arts & Sciences encampment and classes, children's activities, and shopping. Bardic competition, Moonlight Dance Revel, production of *A Mid summer Night's Dream*, bardic circle. www.greatwesternwar.org

OCTOBER 13-15

National Lewis and Clark Falls of the Ohio Bicentennial Signature Event
Louisville, KY and Clarksville, IN

Thirteen-day commemoration opens with reenactment of Lewis's arrival in Louisville and meeting with William Clark, closes with reenactment of the Corps departure from Clarksville. Native American and African American programs, symposium, special exhibits, arts exhibits and performances, expanded annua. Lewis and Clark River Festival (502) 292-0059, dellcourtn@aol.com ; www.fallsoftheohio.org/lewisandclark.shtml. For other Lewis and Clark Bicentennial events, see www.lewisandclark200.org

NOVEMBER 3

Gasfitters Ball A Bohemian Artistes' Celebration. Pasadena, CA

Sherlock Holmes-themed Victorian dinner dance, live music. South Pasadena Women's Club. For more information, call Jerry or Kris Kegley at (818) 894-1501

NOVEMBER 11

Friends of the English Regency Southern California Autumn Ball. Pasadena, CA

South Pasadena Woman's Club at 1424 Fremont Ave, Pasadena. On the corner of Fremont & Rollin St., one block west of Fair Oaks Ave., south of the Fair Oaks exit from State Freeway 110. Beginners' dance lesson at 10 AM, intermediate lesson at 2, box lunches, tea, dancing till midnight, buffet supper at 9:30. Inquiries to John Hertz, 236 S. Coronado St. No. 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057. www.regencyfriends.org

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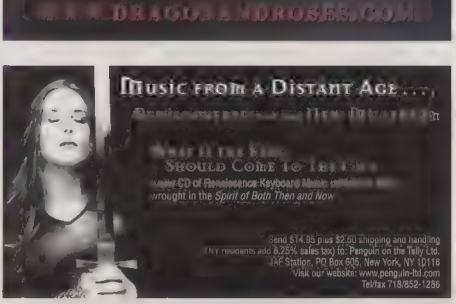
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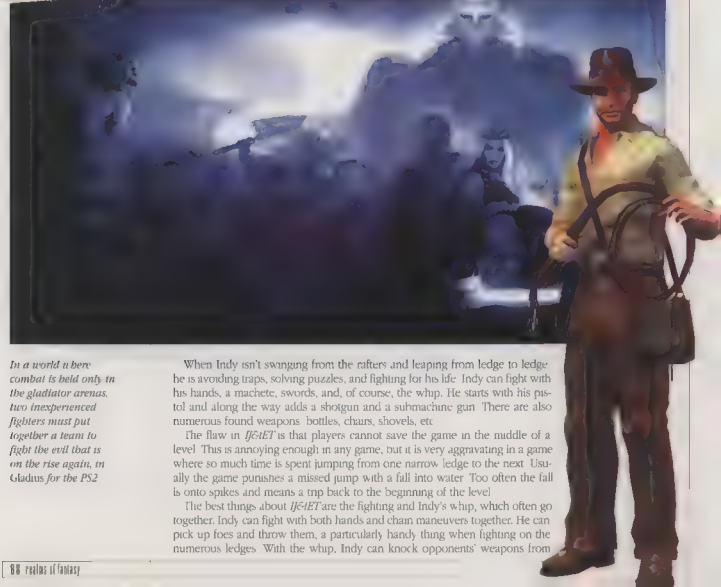
By Eric T. Baker

Crack the whip and swing from the rafters with Indiana Jones.

The Xbox version of *Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb*, the new game by The Collective from Lucas Arts, is also available on the PC and for the PS2. The versions are identical, although the graphics are obviously better on the Xbox and on PCs with good video cards. In all three versions, the player takes the role of Indiana Jones, the movie icon who made archaeology sexy. In the game it is 1935 and the quest is for a giant black pearl with mind-controlling powers. The enemies are ivory hunters, Chinese Triads, and the ever-popular Nazis.

The search for the black pearl takes Indy all over the world—from jungle-encrusted ruins in Ceylon to sunken ruins in Istanbul, to urban ruins in Hong Kong, to medieval ruins in Prague, and so on. All these locations are multitiered and Indy moves about them by climbing, jumping, swinging, swimming and rolling. The swinging most often involves his trusty bullwhip.



In a world where combat is held only in the gladiator arenas, two inexperienced fighters must put together a team to fight the evil that is on the rise again, in Gladius *for the PS2.*

When Indy isn't swinging from the rafters and leaping from ledge to ledge he is avoiding traps, solving puzzles, and fighting for his life. Indy can fight with his hands, a machete, swords, and, of course, the whip. He starts with his pistol and along the way adds a shotgun and a submachine gun. There are also numerous found weapons: bottles, chairs, shovels, etc.

The flaw in *IJ&TET* is that players cannot save the game in the middle of a level. This is annoying enough in any game, but it is very aggravating in a game where so much time is spent jumping from one narrow ledge to the next. Usually the game punishes a missed jump with a fall into water. Too often the fall is onto spikes and means a trip back to the beginning of the level.

The best things about *IJ&TET* are the fighting and Indy's whip, which often go together. Indy can fight with both hands and chain maneuvers together. He can pick up foes and throw them, a particularly handy thing when fighting on the numerous ledges. With the whip, Indy can knock opponents' weapons from

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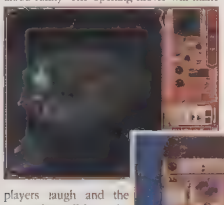
their hands, or entangle them and pull them in for a quick right hook. *Ikkitt* is one of those games where players will actually wish for more Nazi heads to bash in with a chair.

Combat of a completely different sort is on display in *Kung Fu Chaos* by Just Add Monsters from Microsoft for the Xbox. See *KFC* is a comedy, as those initials indicate. It's not just intended to be funny, but actually laugh-aloud funny. The opening movie will make



players laugh and the game play will keep the chuckles coming.

Done in cartoon style and inspired by the Kung Fu movies of the 1970s, players fight as one of nine characters. Xiu Tan Sour (a tough chick with deadly fans), Chop & Styx (a Samurai with his son in a backpack), Lucy Cannon (a sista' with an afro and a shotgun), and six more icons of the genre. The characters move, fight, jump, and taunt like the characters from the source films. In fact, the taunts act as a powerup, three good one liners let the characters unleash devastating special attacks.

The conceit for the battles is that the characters are starring in a Shao Ting film. The fights happen on large, moving, destructible sets. The opponents are various ninja and the sets themselves. The objectives duplicate the most common plots of the source films, and when a level is over, the action can be replayed in a movie mode that automatically adds new camera angles, special effects, and commentary by Shao Ting. As much fun as the battles are to play, they are even funnier to watch replayed, particularly the multiplayer-mode ones. A game has to be good when it lets players watch the replay of their character cracking a watermelon over another character's head in slow-motion closeup.

For more serious adventure check out *Skies of Arcadia Legends* from Sega for the Gamecube. In this roleplaying title, the player takes the role of Vyse, a young member of the Blue Rogue pirates. Accompanied by his friend, Aika, and a mystery girl, Fina, Vyse must battle an entire enemy nation. As the game unfolds, the player must gather a crew of air pirates and fight the empire across unknown skies, harassed by monsters and evil pirates.

The game play revolves around interaction with wonderfully animated heroes, monsters, and villains. The interaction happens in well rendered environments, and leads the player through a deep and unpredictable story line. The characters use 70 weapons and 36 magical skills to meet their enemies over six huge levels, ranging from massive deserts and quaint villages to the cold reaches of outer space.

Besides building up Vyse, Aika, and Fina, the player must also customize Vyse's airship. Part of that involves enlisting as many as 22 crewmembers who not only help on Vyse's ship but can also protect others. The game engine depicts hand-to-hand and ship-to-ship combat with gorgeous effects, particularly those for the special attacks. All in all, it is console roleplaying at its best.

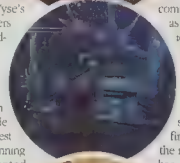
Far from the stunning skies of an invented world, *Tenchu's Wrath of Heaven* from Activision for the PS2 is set during the days of violent warfare and civil strife in 16th-century Japan. The mysterious Tenrai is trying to conquer the land with an army of ninjas and creatures of darkness. Players take the role of either Rikimaru or Ayame, deadly ninja assassins sent by their master, Lord Gohda, to stop Tenrai.

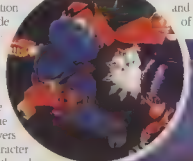
The game takes the form of trying to sneak about each level and silently kill various guards, ninja, and demons without being seen. To help, the characters use 20 authentic ninja weapons and tools over the course of the game. Killing silently not only racks up more points than noisy kills, but also earns Kuji. Enough Kuji earned unlocks new abilities and new fighting combos.

The missions in the game include espionage, theft, and assassination. Each level is different, requiring a variety of techniques. The game's artificial intelligence is good enough to make all the levels challenging. Guards are not just stationary targets, they patrol and react when they find fallen comrades. This means that it is as important to hide the bodies of the slain as it is to kill them in the first place.

Tenchu can be played more than once because each level has three unique enemy placements so that what worked the first time through may not the next. In addition, the game has multiple endings, each depending on how the player decided to go through the game. Better yet, there is a two-player mode. This can be simple death matching, but it is more fun to play the cooperative missions with a friend on one of the five multiplayer levels.

In *Gladius*, the new turn-based gladiatorial roleplaying game from Lucas Arts for the PS2, the world is much more peaceful than in *Tenchu's* Japan. The world of Gladius has survived its Great War. Instead of armies contesting over battlefields, combat now is held only in the gladiator arenas. Schools from around the world compete in these arenas for the title of Imperial Champions. If it sounds too good to last, it





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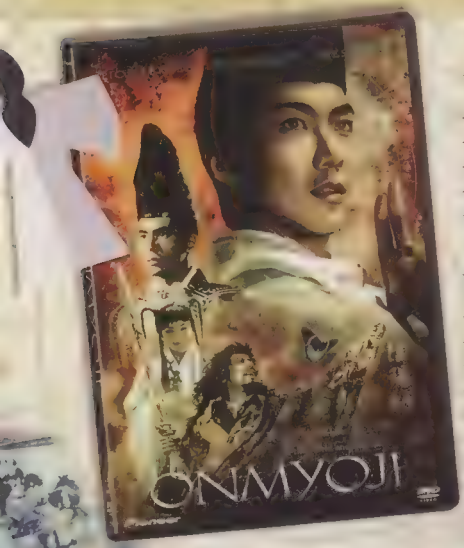

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land of Channon, where the capital city has become the target of five invading armies. Players lead each army in turn, trying to fight their way to the capital and the final battle.

In addition to that campaign, the expansion has new single scenario maps created by both New World Computing and by contest-winning fans. There are also six new *Heroes* campaigns, three original fantastic creatures, new adventure objects, and new storylines for the campaigns. Obviously, players who liked *HMMIV* will want to extend the fun with this expansion.

At one time, all a party of *Dungeons & Dragons* players needed to outfit their characters for a dungeon crawl was contained on three pages in the Player's Guide. That was a lot of years ago. The *Arms and Equipment Guide* for *D&D* from Wizards of the Coast contains 160 pages of items, equipment, arms, armor, hirelings, mounts, and guard animals, plus ships, zeppelins, submarines, siege equipment, and land walkers. Some of these things are collected from previous *D&D* products, but most are new.

The book contains 230 magic weapons and armors, plus 125 magic items. Those are great, but you have to love any supplement that contains a section on both vermin mounts and devotes three pages to unique alcoholic beverages. The book is very light on art and most of the pictures depict the items and equipment described in the text. This is particularly helpful for the weirder weapons and more exotic vehicles. It is one thing to say the players encounter a gnomish submarine. It is another to be able to show a picture of it.

And from the "Now for something completely different" file: *Amplitude* from Sony for the PS2 is the sequel to *Frequency*. In a departure from adventure and death and fantastic creatures, *Amplitude* is a game of performing and creating music. It features music from David Bowie, Weezer, Garbage, Quarashi, and Logan 7. In a sort of *Space Invaders* meets *Tetris* interface, the player pilots his icon down paths that represent the drum, bass, vocal, and guitar tracks of songs. By tapping the control pad in time to the rhythm, the player shoots multicolored targets, unlocking the track. Points are scored by opening tracks and keeping them open.

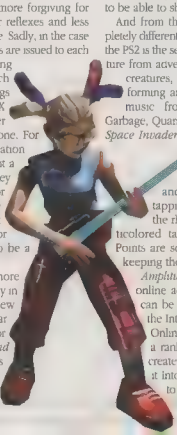
Amplitude is compatible with Sony's online adapter, so multiplayer games can be done around the TV or over the Internet with friends miles away. Online options include full chat and a ranking system. Players can also create a remix online, and then save it into the system for other players to listen to and play.

is. Evil is on the rise again and it is the players' characters who will have to confront it.

Players begin the game as Ursula and Valens, two trained but inexperienced fighters. The two of them travel the world, battling in the arenas, recruiting other gladiators to their school, and training themselves and their team. The fights use both weapons and magic. Sixteen character classes and 100 unique character types mean that no two battles are the same.

The important distinction in the game play of *Gladius* is that it is turn-based. In this way, the game is much more like the *Final Fantasy* series than it is like *Baulder's Gate* or *Guantlet*. This should be a good thing since turn-based combat is usually more forgiving for those players with slower reflexes and less button-mashing experience. Sadly, in the case of *Gladius*, while the orders are issued to each character in turn, executing them still requires a twitch element. For simple swings the players must push the X button when a slider reaches the red, critical zone. For sweeping and combination attacks, the player must hit a sequence of buttons as they appear on the screen. For experienced video game players, this twitch element will be no trouble, but for newcomers, it is likely to be a frustration.

Fantasy warfare of a more traditional type is on display in the latest expansion to New World Computing's popular real time strategy game for the PC, *Heroes of Might and Magic IV*. This expansion is called *Winds of War* and transports players to the



worshipping

Continued from page 40

me to do it. Is that correct?

The Saint hesitated. "Well ... yes."

They both remained silent for a time. It was Makoto who finally broke that silence.

So, in essence, your buddha commanded you to come to my mountain and endeavor to teach patience to a stone?

For a moment Makoto thought the Saint had been struck by lightning. His breath escaped him in a loud hiss. His eyes grew wide and his mouth fell open, and his lower jaw moved up and down spasmodically, but nothing else came out. For a moment Makoto thought he was going to scream, or perhaps cry. What he did do was even more odd—the Saint threw himself to the ground at Makoto's feet, or where Makoto's feet would have been if he currently had feet.

Master!" The Saint's shout was pure joy.

Makoto barely had time to consider this new strangeness before he suddenly had to get used to not being a stone anymore. He stood again on his own two legs, though he was so unused to standing that he decided to sit on a nearby rock instead. The Saint kept his face buried in the dirt all the while.

"Master, I did not recognize the buddha in you. Please forgive your humble and foolish servant," he said finally. He still didn't look up.

"Ummm ... certainly, if you'll leave this place now."

The Saint did finally look up. His eyes were shining so brightly it was almost painful to look at him. "I will. I will go back into the world now and take the lesson you have taught me."

Makoto didn't say anything to that, not having any idea of what *to* say in the face of evident madness, though the idea of containing this "buddha" within him was very disturbing. It was only after the Saint was gone for good that Makoto thought of having the Saint change him back into a stone. Makoto had rather liked being a stone. Yet it was probably for the best, Makoto thought after considering the matter for a while. Who knew what the lunatic might have done then? Perhaps turned him into a mist or a frog or whatnot, or imposed more of this notion of Makoto containing buddhas, an idea that Makoto resisted with all the god within him. He realized that things were probably better as they were, now that they were finally back to the way they were.

"If only I'd known he was that easy to get rid of," Makoto said aloud.

Still, considering the nonsense that brought him to Makoto's mountain in the first place, there was always the possibility that the Saint would come back. It'd be hard to escape from him then with only that one path up and down the mountain. Makoto eyed the next mountain over, thoughtfully.

Maybe a bridge wasn't such a bad idea.

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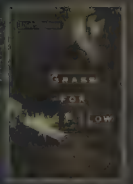

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kristin

Continued from page 45

"Whatever " He should have cared more that she d managed to put him out of her mind so completely, but he, too, found himself looking at her with fresh eyes The sting of the old arguments, the mental scabs over the old wounds, seemed less important to him than his impressions of her here, today, now. Kristin was quirky and attractive. Elusive Intriguing He wondered how it would be to walk with her along a deserted beach at sun set. Whether she liked having her back scratched Whether she preferred to cook or clean up.

His head was starting to ache. He should have known that sooner or later he'd start reacting to the damned gouts. They'd probably have him sneezing and snoring for days.

"Gotta go," said Paul, and without thinking about it he leaned forward and kissed her. a sociable peck and totally not a pass, but she did not flinch, and her lips moved momentarily beneath his. He felt the tiny down on her upper lip. A stray lock of her hair tickled his cheek Again he enjoyed the faint, familiar aroma of her sweat

The sensations didn t tear at the old scars Quite the reverse, her lips felt brand new, like a promise

The kiss had taken a single instant, but just touching her and breathing her had left him dizzy Her eyes were unreadable "Oh, boy," he said. "I'm so completely sorry about that I should go

"Meh-eh," said Parsley. Or the other one, whatever it was called

"All I wanted was to forget you," she said softly. "And now I don't even remember why

He knelt and looked at the goats again They didn't seem hungry any more. "Hmmm," he said. "Anything?"

Kristin made the conversational switch effortlessly, as he'd known she would. "Anything I give them Whatever I don't want."

Paul nodded, though the reason why he'd asked had already escaped him. "Well, I'll see you."

"Not if I see you first," she said cheerfully

Odd that he'd dreaded coming round here for so long

As Paul slid into the driver's seat he glanced up at the window of Kristin's third-floor apartment and frowned From the Honda's glovebox he took out the notebook he wrote his gasoline purchases and mileages in, and scribbled Kristin/3307 on the back page Then, to be safe, he wrote the whole address His fingers still felt silky against each other

He drove out to the gate of the apartment complex While he waited to turn onto the main road he glanced over his shoulder The Honda's back seat seemed surprisingly empty Was this really all there was?

Well, if he d left something behind, he could always go back

take blood

Continued from page 49

made, because he had heard them often His friend gripped his arm. As always, human hands felt cold, as if they were already dead

"Then don't stop me," Teekan said.

"You can live many more years here I'll be here, Esamel will be here We can have a little fun A few laughs

He meant well He was a very good friend, for a human. Teekan returned the squeeze on his arm. "I can exist here But to live, I have to fly, and I can't fly anymore "

"And I can't do handstands any more, but I don t want to die because of it."

"Well, that's you And I'm me And demons who can no longer hunt go gladly to the Other One. I collected more feckless and unwise than any before me, and I would now like to collect my reward in the Great Below "

Anjit's eyes welled with tears He patted Teekan's arm and stood up. "I am truly sorry Perhaps you will feel better in a while Would you rather be alone now?"

Teekan nodded He wanted to tell Anjit that he had made a dismal time more bearable, and that there were some things that the kingdom of the monstrous did a lot better than the realm of humans, such as knowing when a cycle was completed. But he thought Anjit might be more upset if he did

Teekan never thought he would find himself sparing a human's feelings

The sun had just a few minutes to sink to the horizon. It was a fine evening with an amber sunset, and Teekan watched the shadows lengthen from his window It had taken him 10 minutes to force the sash up enough to get through it.

There was a knock on the door, then the doorknob rattled. "Teekan?" Anjit called "Teekan why have you locked the bloody door? Open up!"

The breeze was cool on his face He tested his wings, squatting on the sill. It was amazing what ibuprofen could do even for a demon His joints felt supple. The fact that it was temporary didn't matter now.

I m going for a flight," he shouted. "Just cuss at that sky!'

And Teekan jumped.

He rose over the yard and the pine fence, a demon again He had only a few hundred yards left in him, but it was enough, and it was a lovely, lovely evening He climbed higher, as high as he could go until his lungs strained to cope, and then he banked toward the sports ground, down toward the velvet perfect cricket pitch. His speed was increasing to terminal velocity. It would be quick

He was not just any old demon He was Baal Teekan Makak And he wondered what rewards the Great Below had in store for him

turnings

Continued from page 71

Viv walked with the Harvester and listened as he bargained, studying what she would need to know, someday. It was all she had ever known All she had ever expected All she had ever desired

"Where did you find this?" she asked, holding the blue glass to the Sun to see it glisten It was smooth, not sharp-edged It looked like a raindrop, and felt like combed cotton under her fingertips

"By the shoreline," the Trader told her, showing the other pieces, blue and green and sun-yellow. "Same place we picked up young Than "

"I was bored," he had told her "Restless And they seemed like a good ride "

The Harvester frowned There was no need for bits of colored glass. Viv touched the blue again, gently, and moved on in his wake

"Tell me again about the ocean "

He settled her snugly against his shoulder, watching the dust rise under pony hooves stomping around the edges of their corral "At night, the sky is darkest blue, and the stars are polished silver like knifepoints cutting through And the Moon opens a path on the darkling waters that you would swear you could walk, if only you could take that first step

In his words, she could hear his heart beating, and it flowed from him to her until she could not tell where his heart ended and hers began. It was not the things he told her, she tried to explain to Rory, sitting on a log stump as he split and corded wood It was the power he felt, the love that rose within him. The passion that spoke.

"He's a Tidemaster." Rory said, and said no more

It was all that needed to be said

Whatever had brought him here would surely wash him back out again. That was as it would be, and desire could not change it, nor anger move it. nor wishes reshape it. She could rail, and storm, and it would change nothing of the truth It was not for them, not this time

"Watch," she told him, and held out her hand, palm down, touching the soil warmed from the morning Sun. She sang to the seed, praising it, and it rose to her call, poking a corner-tipped streamer through the dark, rich loam, yearning for her as much as for the Sun

He touched the ground, touched her hand

His tears were saltier than any she had ever tasted

She watched the stars instead of his face, acutely aware of the heat rising from his skin as he lay beside her. The grass was cool on her bare skin, the ground beneath letting go

of the day's heat

"I can't remember our first kiss," she told him The taste, the texture, the sudden understanding—but not the time, the place, the moment Had they never kissed before that moment, had it been a return to a kiss begun ages before

"It was a lifetime ago," he said His fingers reached for her, stopping just shy of touching Heat rose from his skin, sank into hers, returned

"A lifetime," she said An eternity, without beginning, without end She clung to that, against the pain, the harsh truth of this place, this Now

A month turned past, the days slipping into night, and nights into day Viv kept still, willing the moments to linger, knowing the nature of time is to pass The Now is only a moment, Than whispered in her ear

She woke, rose from an empty bed, stood in the dirt watching with her eyes sere and soft. The sunlight touched the greening fields, lit the shadows of Traders rising, loading caravans. Collapsing tents. Hitching horses Dogs nipping the heels of newly acquired ewes and cows Than stood among the Traders, his own belongings packed and tucked into one wagon, somewhere in the orderly confusion

Stay," she had not said.

"Come with me," he had not asked

Viv stood in the darkness, watching the stars Somewhere, elsewhere, the Traders moved on their trails Somewhere, elsewhere, the tide washed on the shore, and then out again

The ground beneath her bare feet hummed in sleepy satisfaction, and her toes curled in response This was home This was right

And it was all terribly, terribly wrong Her hand moved to cover her heart, as though expecting it to be torn, bleeding Surprised when it remained intact a betrayal

The heart grows roots that tangle deep, draw water, survive storms And when love ends, you can build a flame to warm you from the fuel they leave

Love with the heart, and the head, the old women said. Be wise, be safe And keep your soul your own

Her fingers clenched, digging into the skin until she could feel the pain Minds might change and hearts might heal, but the soul, once given, was forever gone

Viv was a daughter of the soil, born to the changing of the seasons, raised with the steady beat of the land Her hair was black and her eyes were brown, and when she smiled, as she often did, it was the gentle rain on fresh-turned dirt

And when she sang for her kin, as the Harvester often did, it was the snow on winter-sleeping fields, and the promise of spring to come again

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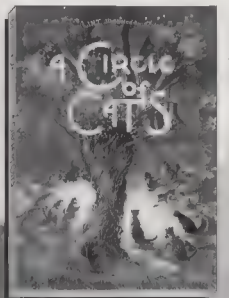

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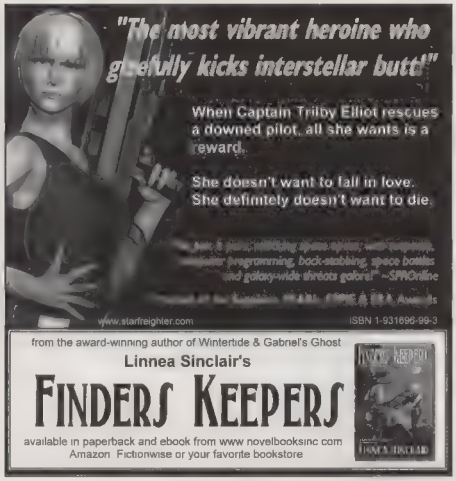
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seamstress

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A time later we are entwined, catching our breaths

From the way I knew how to touch him, I gather that I had other lovers when I lived in the world. A husband, maybe, or a handsome village lad. My body remembers the act of love the same way my fingers remember how to stitch

I think about Marya and her questions. With my callused fingertips I trace the scars that cross his back like knotted ropes. "Do you remember anything from before?" I ask

He rolls onto his side to look at me, his eyes dark. "No." He rests his hand on the swell of my hip and gives a wry smile. "Just the now. I've decided to forget everything before this very moment."

"And will you forget this moment when it has passed?"

He gives the half-smile again. "I don't know. Maybe."

I do understand. His scars feel rough and unhealed beneath my fingertips. "I think we should try to get away."

He sits up abruptly and jerks the shirt from beneath us. The stone floor is freezing against my bare skin. "God," he says, teeth suddenly chattering. "She'd kill us if she caught us. I'd better get started on the slipper pattern, before it's too late." He climbs to his feet, pulling on his trousers, tucking in his shirt, looking around for his tools.

I lean my head against my hand and watch him. "But what if she didn't catch us?"

He pauses, looking down at me. "I don't know." He sits down at his workbench, hands clenched on his knees. "Maybe you're right. Maybe we should."

I sit up and braid my hair, slip into my shift, and retie my apron. When I go to the door, he watches, his face full of doubt. I put my hand on the latch. "I am going."

That decides him. He gets to his feet and joins me.

We make our way through the castle, which sleeps as if enchanted, down the stairs, through the corridors, and out into the courtyard. The wind howls, blowing gusts of snow before it. The gateway yawns open and empty, the guards huddled inside over their watchroom fires. We pause and cast one last look back at the castle then turn to face the gate.

What do you think it will be like?" he asks.

I don't know. It could be empty darkness. It could be wildflower meadows and villages and fat harvests. It could be pursuit by ravening hounds and flame-eyed hunters.

No matter. I will go, whatever lies ahead. What do I have to stay for? Stitch stitch stitch until I'm blind? Bone needles and silken threads? Better to go on, to find out what lies beyond the gate.

Holding hands like those children lost in the woods, we step over the threshold. ❧

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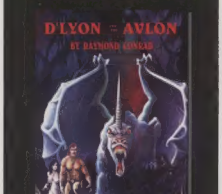

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lizard and bees

Continued from page 59

she was short or tall or fat or thin; her body was changed beyond such things. She leaned against a tree (it looked like she was *fused* to the tree), and her chest was filled with hexagonal chambers dripping honey. Bees flew around her like a black-and-yellow poison aura.

"Jay," she said, or else the bees buzzed and made a sound like words.

"E. Are you ..." He shook his head. "I came to get you. To bring you back."

The buzzing increased in volume, and the bees moved faster and more erratically. I wondered if someone would get stung, and what a sting from an underworld bee would do. I hung back. This wasn't my journey, and I wanted to stay out of the way. It seemed to me, though, that E. was at peace. Like she'd left her troubles behind.

"I'm full of honey now," she said.

"Baby," Jay said softly. "I've come such a long way ..."

But he hadn't, not really. Where were the trials? The tests, the bargains, the obstacles? Or were they still ahead? If this was it, if he just had to lead E. out of here now, it was too *easy*. If this was all it took, the world would be full of the rescued dead, and no one would ever have to mourn again.

Something slinked into my peripheral vision, and when I turned my head, I saw monitor lizards. Big as wolves, with dark green scales, wedge-shaped heads, watchful unblinking eyes. They flickered their tongues. They beckoned me.

I knew the lizards could take me to H. The real H., or what was left of him, whatever essential part had passed on.

"I can come back with you," E. said, a dreamy buzz. "But only if you don't look back. You can never look back."

"Like Orpheus," Jay said.

I knew that story. Learned it in school. Orpheus went into the underworld to bring back his dead lover, and he was told she would follow him back to the land of the living—as long as he didn't look back on the way out. And, of course, Orpheus didn't hear her behind him, and he doubted, and he looked over his shoulder, and that was that. She sank back into death forever. I always thought Orpheus was an idiot, having one rule and breaking it, but now, *here*, I suddenly understood.

Don't look back. It wasn't meant literally. It didn't mean "Don't turn your head," it meant "Don't *remember*." Because how could your lover live, if you knew she had died? How could you go on loving her, with the weight of that knowledge, with all that interrupted grief clogging up your head? You had to *forget it all*, drink the waters of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, and afterward you'd never understand why your lover was afraid of subway stations and cemeteries, why she refused to go to your aunt's funeral with you, why she wept on gray days and stared off into the middle distance as if she were looking at things you'd never be able to see. Because *she* wouldn't forget about her death. Just you.

I thought about all the gray, hollow people I'd met in my life, shuffling through their days as if they were swathed in shrouds no one else could see, and I wondered how many of them had been dead, once upon a time, and come back, and remembered.

I looked at the sinuous lizards, at their indifferent grace. They would lead me to H., if I let them. I would find my dead lover holding a needle full of Lethe-water, more potent than any drug we'd taken in the old days, and then what? Would we go back in time? Would I be a star again, with H. by my side? A strangely quiet H., still doing drugs but for a different reason, trying to forget something he knew I would never remember again?

Because the dead know things, even if they come back to life, and because it is still up to the living to act, to *choose*.

Was I willing to forget all the pain, everything I'd learned since H.'s death, in order to bring him back, to have him suffer, and remember, and be lost to me again someday?

"The bees can sting you," E. said to Jay. "They can sting the loss away, and then I can follow you back. If you want." She sounded totally indifferent.

"Don't you want to come with me?" Jay asked.

"It's up to you."

"Of course I want you back," he said, and walked into the black and yellow mist of bees.

I turned and walked away, taking big ground-eating steps. The lizards followed me, paced me, and I started running to get away from them, from their cool, green temptation. I wept as I ran. I wondered if H. would understand why I was running away, if he would want it this way, too.

I found the train, and its doors hissed open at my approach. The lizards hung back among the stone trees, watching me.

I looked back at them, for a long moment, then wiped the tears from my eyes. I got on the train. Jay would find his own way back, into the sun, and E. with him. But he would never understand why she didn't want to go outside, why she was so afraid of bees and dark places, and he would leave her eventually, I think, because the strange, sad girl who came back would not be the woman he'd loved. *That* was Jay's trial, his price to pay.

"Doors are closing," the driver whispered over the speaker, in tones of warning. These doors wouldn't open again, not for me. This was my one and only trip on this train, at least while I was alive.

"Let them close," I said, and rode back through the emptiness in the belly of the night, toward another morning, having nothing but my memories, but holding tightly to those, holding them as though they were worth all the rest of my life. ❧

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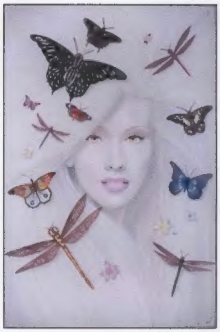

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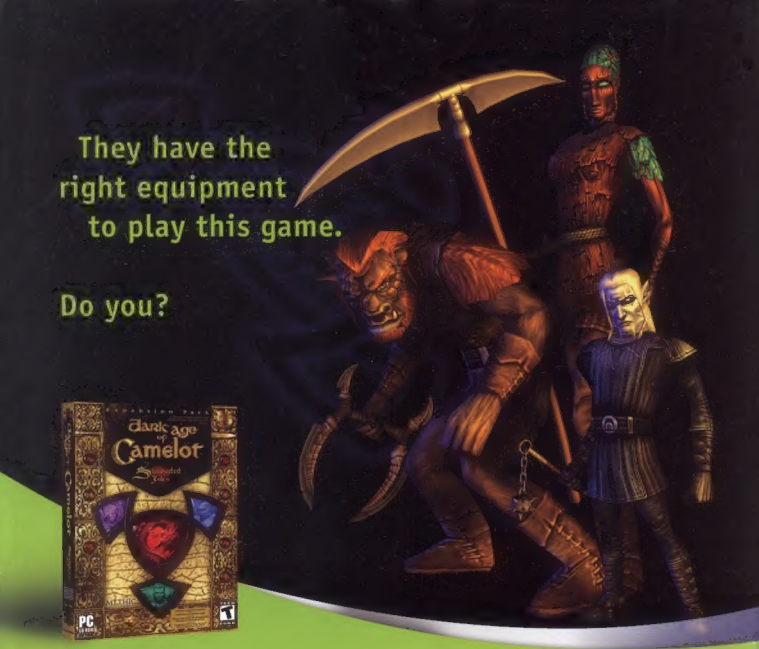

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